A limited choice

Mothers' voices about the decision for school type at the secondary level for children with special socio-emotional needs

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how the decision for the type of school at the secondary level is made for children with special socio-emotional needs from their mothers' point of view. The study was conducted in the state of Thuringia in Germany against the background of its recent development towards a more inclusive school system.

The research problem was addressed qualitatively. Seven semistructured interviews were conducted in order to listen to the mothers' voices, that is, their experiences and perceptions with the phenomenon under study. Two of the informants had a child in regular school and another two informants had a child in regular school since the beginning of secondary schooling. Three other informants had a child that changed or was going to change from regular to special school at secondary level. For the analysis of the collected data, an interpretational approach based on the principles of hermeneutics was used.

The data revealed that the school decision was an interactive process among three contributors: the child, the teacher, and the mother herself. A child's high degree of problem behavior, accompanied by low school achievement, encouraged the decision for special school. Mothers of children in special school had in most cases a weaker social background than mothers of children in regular school. Teachers' recommendations for school type were in most cases followed, but their ability to deal with children with special needs was perceived as limited. The teachers' advice convinced four mothers in the sample to agree to special school in spite of their initial negative attitudes. On the part of the mothers, a high level of involvement was required in order to achieve regular schooling for their children, but in most cases not possessed by them. The decision for regular school was reversed in three cases. Class size, teacher competence and care, belonging, and future perspectives were factors of significance to the mothers in the evaluation of the schools.

On the basis of the findings, the researcher formulated implications and recommendations. More support and further training for teachers should be provided, so that they feel empowered to cooperate with parents and encourage regular secondary schooling for children with special socio-emotional needs.

Key words: special socio-emotional needs, decision for type of school, secondary level, regular school, special school, mothers' voices

Foreword

Working on this master's thesis has taught me a lot. It confirmed my commitment to inclusive education, but showed me also what a great challenge it actually is in a country like Germany. During my field work, I came closer to teaching practice and was presented with different viewpoints regarding inclusive education including its limitations. Thanks to the contact with the informants, I now feel much closer to parents and their concerns because they gave me the chance to obtain this understanding. I am sure I will benefit from it in my future career.

I also learned that the research process itself is not something that can be explained to you theoretically – if you want to understand what it is all about, you simply need to do it yourself, experience its ups and downs, make mistakes, and try out different approaches. However, I appreciated all support I got in this process and want to use this opportunity to say thank you:

A special thanks to my informants. Without their generosity with private information and their readiness to help in spite of the difficult topic, I would not have been able to complete this study. Also, all the other helpful people I met, including principals and teachers, deserve my acknowledgment.

Thanks to my supervisor, Berit Helene Johnsen, for challenging me, as well as believing in me and being available at all times. Thanks also to the University of Oslo for giving me the opportunity to get to know my wonderful fellow students, from whom I learned so much. Your warming and happy company was greatly appreciated and will be missed deeply.

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Last, but not least, I want to thank René for his unbreakable support, as well as my family and friends for their encouragement and love.

Kind regards
Anne Petersmann

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1 Introduction

Parents have responsibility and power when it comes to the first steps towards inclusion in the area under study because the law says that they are the ones who have the right to decide what school type their child will attend. For parents of a child with special needs, the decision often involves a special school on the one hand and a regular school on the other hand.

Despite the priority of inclusive education, agreed on and emphasized by international and national policy, a significant number of children with special needs still are enrolled in special schools in Germany every year. In order to promote inclusion, attention should be paid to the decision process itself. Listening to parents, like I chose to do in this study, provides the opportunity to uncover how decisions are made and what must be improved for the benefit of inclusion.

This study examines mothers' experiences with the decision for secondary schooling for their children with special socio-emotional needs in my home country Germany. Parents of children with socio-emotional needs are often associated with a low social status due to reasons explained later in the thesis. I believe that this is why they are underrepresented in research related to successful regular schooling of children with special needs. During my field work, I attended a conference shedding light on parents' experiences with *Joint Education* (see 1.3.1) in Thuringia, the area of study. None of the presenting parents had a child with special socio-emotional needs. Therefore, I thought that it was especially important to listen to this group of parents' voices in this study, as they still are the decision makers when it comes to the schooling of their children, regardless of their social status and competence.

The research problem is presented in the next subchapter, followed by a short reflection on the purpose of this study. Germany's cultural background in terms of education is indispensable for the understanding of the study and is therefore provided in subchapter 1.3. Next, two important concepts are discussed in "Use of terminology" (1.4). Subchapter 1.5 provides a brief outline of the study.

1.1 Research problem

The research problem providing the basis for this study was formulated as follows:

How is the decision for regular or special school at the secondary level made for children with special socio-emotional needs?

It was explored with the help of two subquestions:

- Who are the key contributors to the decision and how do they affect the process?
- Which key criteria do mothers emphasize in their evaluation of the different school types and how?

The research problem was examined through the voices of mothers, that is, their perspective on the phenomenon under study: *the decision for school at the secondary level for children with special socio-emotional needs.* The reader should be aware of the fact that this approach probably results in different conclusions than if I had focused on, for example, the teachers' perspective. One should also recognize that the concept of "decision" here is understood as a *process*. This indicates that the decision for school is not something that is made at one point of time. In contrast, it involves continuous evaluation which may lead to modifications. This perspective justifies the incorporation of the experiences prior to, during and after the actual decision in the concept of school decision.

1.2 Purpose of the study

Having grown up in Germany, I have lived in Norway for about five years. I was introduced to the idea of inclusion when I first came to Norway and have been a supporter of inclusive education ever since. This is why I wish to make a contribution to empirical research in my home country, supporting a rather new movement towards inclusion in its development.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how different school decisions are made for children with special socio-emotional needs. Since the mother (in this study, representing the parents) is the one who, according to the law, is the final decision maker, I found her perspective to be of specific interest and value. I chose to conduct descriptive research in order to achieve this improved understanding of the phenomenon under study.

According to Gall, Gall, & Borg (2007) "the researcher attempts to depict a phenomenon and conceptualize it" (p. 451) in such a study.

With regard to the scope of the study, I focused on only one group of mothers – those having a child with special socio-emotional needs. This choice was taken due to the increasing number of children dealing with such challenges and, in turn, the increasing challenges that accompany educating children with special socio-emotional needs. There was no personal attachment involved in this decision.

1.3 Cultural background of the study

Germany's differentiating and selective school system has developed over centuries and is well-established (Wocken, 2011b). This statement may be regarded as the basis for this thesis, and will therefore be explained in a short introduction to the German school system and its recent developments.

1.3.1 German school system

First, it is important to know that there is not *one* school system in Germany, but several. The Federal Republic of Germany is subdivided into 16 states, each of which has its own school system. The term *Kulturhoheit der Länder* means that the responsibility for education primarily lies with the federal states individually. This was approved by the Constitution of 1949 and has persisted in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) ever since. To avoid major differences between the educational systems of the different states, however, "[t]he entire school system shall be under the supervision of the state" (BMJ, 2012, Basic Law, Art. 7 (1)). This act was put into practice by establishing the *Kultusministerkonferenz*, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the States in the FRG.

None of the federal states has a school system that is purely comprehensive (Wocken, 2011b). In the Weimar Republic after the First World War, selecting systems with two to three types of secondary education, based on a pupil's level of mastery as determined by teacher recommendations, were established and continued in West Germany (Schnell, 2003). Through this selecting system, the government wanted to create equal school opportunities for all children, independent of their social origin and status. Ability and achievement were meant

to be the only factors that influenced a child's schooling. That was the intention (Wocken, 2011b).

Although most children attended comprehensive schools in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) in eastern Germany, West German politics, laws and also the school system, were adopted in the entire reunited nation after 1990. One of the five re-established states in the former GDR that were reunited with West Germany is Thuringia, the area under study. In Thuringia, as in most other German states, children are today separated according to their abilities after primary school, which ends after grade 4. The decision for secondary school is among a regular lower secondary school (*Regelschule*), a regular higher secondary school which qualifies the pupils for university entrance (*Gymnasium*) and a comprehensive school (*Gesamtschule*) (TMBWK, 2010). In addition, there are special schools for all types of special needs: in the field of hearing, sight, physical development, learning, language, socio-emotional development, and mental development (TMBWK, 2003). Special schools exist parallel to primary schools and the different types of secondary schools.

In spite of this selecting system, recent developments are more and more pointing towards comprehensive schools and inclusion.

1.3.2 Recent developments

The school systems of the federal states are in constant flux. Results below the OECD-mean in the first PISA study (OECD, 2000) led to discussions in schools up to the political level in Germany. In some of the states, an extension of the primary school from four to six years was considered, which so far is applied by only two states. A new kind of comprehensive school (*Gemeinschaftsschule*) has emerged in Thuringia and other states, now including grades 1-12 (TMBWK, 2010). In contrast, the established comprehensive school (*Gesamtschule)* starts in grade 5. Comprehensive school means that it combines lower with higher secondary school, and the pupils can obtain different school degrees according to their abilities. In this regard, it provides flexible opportunities for the pupils. However, pupils with special needs are not necessarily taken into consideration.

The most interesting development regarding this study represents an ongoing paradigm shift in disability policy. People with disabilities, previously excluded by the majority from society and discriminated also in terms of schooling, have been accepted and included more and more

by law (see 2.3.1). Following international standards (see 2.3.2), Germany's school systems have started their way towards inclusion.

In Thuringia, a *Research Center for Joint Education* (German: „Forschungs- und Arbeitsstelle für den Gemeinsamen Unterricht[1]“,) was established. Since the school year 2003/2004, its goal has been to include as many children with disabilities as possible in regular primary and secondary schools. Special schools are turned into *Resource Centers*[2] (German: "Förderzentren"), which means that their teachers work more and more in regular schools in order to support pupils with special needs in regular classrooms. This is called *Mobile Services for Special Needs Education* (German: "Mobiler Sonderpädagogischer Dienst", short: MSD). Moreover, pupils with special needs are still educated at these Resource Centers, although their numbers are declining. This means that, at this stage of the movement towards a more inclusive school system in Thuringia, there are different options of schooling for a child with special needs. This situation raises questions concerning the decision for school at secondary level (see 1.1) that I am going to elaborate on, both theoretically and empirically, in this thesis.

1.4 Use of terminology

Before going on to the main part of the thesis, the use and understanding of important terms is clarified in this subchapter.

1.4.1 Joint Education versus inclusion

The concept of inclusion is rather new in the field of Special Needs Education, superseding the term integration. *Integration* referred to separate parts that are put together to an entity (Dalen, 2006). In the context of education, this would mean that *integration* refers to two different groups of pupils (disabled vs. non disabled). The term *inclusion* developed as a reaction to the changing notion of *integration*. It refers to one, indivisible heterogenic group of students, where the needs of every single student are taken into consideration. Hans

[1]See website of the Research Center: www.gu-thue.de (Thüringer Forschungs- und Arbeitsstelle für den Gemeinsamen Unterricht, 2010).
[2] The translation of school-related terminology from German to English is in some cases not clear and therefore problematic. In this thesis, I will distinguish between regular and special schools, yet keeping in mind that the word "Förderschule" (special school) is now officially incorrect in Thuringia.

Wocken described it in 1987 as *affirmed and wanted heterogeneity* (as cited in Wocken, 2011a, p. 106; translated from German).

In the light of these definitions, one must acknowledge that educational practice in Germany is still far away from reaching this goal. *Inclusion* is thus an inappropriate term to use in this context. Instead, I refer to the phrase used in Thuringia, *Joint Education* or Learning Together (German: "Gemeinsamer Unterricht"), representing the first fundamental steps towards a more inclusive school system.

Chapter 2.3 provides a more extensive elaboration on the concept of inclusion.

1.4.2 Special socio-emotional needs

In literature, one finds different terminology related to rather similar concepts in the field of special needs. Befring (2008) uses the term *problem behavior* (Norwegian: "problematferd"). He further lists different terms that are used somewhat interchangeably in literature, among them *social and emotional problems* (Norwegian: "sosiale og emosjonelle problemer") and *psychosocial difficulties* (Norwegian: "psykososiale vansker"). Kirk, Gallagher, Coleman, and Anastasiow (2009) write about "Emotional and Behavior Disorders". These terms express small interpretational differences, but have in common that they combine an inner perspective (emotional/psycho-) with an outer perspective (social/behavior). This is why one usually does not only look at the individual displaying such problems, but also at its surroundings.

As the research for this thesis was conducted in Germany, I chose to use a term that fulfills the requirement to reflect as much as possible the meaning of the officially used German term[3] that can be translated with *priority support in social and emotional development*. It focuses thus on the children's socio-emotional needs instead of on their limitations. For the benefit of meeting these criteria, I decided to speak about children with *special socio-emotional needs* in this thesis. Although being aware of the fact that the term is rather long, I do not expect it to interfere severely with the reading flow.

Theoretical definitions of this concept are provided in chapter 2.2.

[3] „Förderschwerpunkt in Emotionaler und Sozialer Entwicklung", short: ESE

1.5 Outline of the thesis

Chapter 1 has introduced the reader to the topic by elaborations on research questions, purpose and background. The following literature review in chapter 2 provides the theoretical, empirical and political framework before moving on to the empirical part of the study. Chapter 3 presents the methodology I used during the field work. The following chapter 4 contains the results of the data collection. The last part of the thesis is chapter 5, in which I discuss the results in the light of theoretical and empirical knowledge and provide concluding remarks.

2 Framework

This chapter provides the theoretical, empirical and political framework for this study. It is subdivided into four main parts, each of which deals with a specific aspect of relevance for the succeeding empirical part of the study. The main headlines are: *A systemic perspective* (2.1), *Special socio-emotional needs* (2.2), *On the way towards inclusion* (2.3), and *Parents' right of school choice* (2.4).

2.1 A systemic perspective

In accordance with a systemic perspective, this study tries to go beyond the view on the individual and takes its surroundings (systems) into consideration.

In this context, I want to present Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory of the "Ecology of Human Development". It is defined it in the following way:

> *The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded."* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 21)

He describes the ecological environment as a set of concentric circles surrounding a person or a child; each of the circles representing a *system*. These systems are distinguished into *microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem,* and *macrosystem.*

Microsystem refers to social environments in which the child is directly involved, like the family and the school. In this context, Klefbeck and Ogden (2003) emphasize that it is the *relations* that bind social systems together. Examples are the dyadic relations between mother and child or between teacher and child. Inge Bø (2000) defines three basic elements of a relation: reciprocity, power balance, and feelings. Both members in a dyad coordinate their activities according to the other, in this way achieving a basis for mutual development. More possibilities for development lie in social systems where power, understood as increased competence, successively is transferred, such as from a grown-up to a child, and in systems affected by positive feelings.

A key function concerning the development of a child lies in the mesosystem which comprises the interrelations between microsystems. "A mesosystem is thus a system of microsystems" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). According to Bronfenbrenner, the qualities of this system represent possibilities for development in a crucial way. Klefbeck and Ogden (2003) specify that the mesosystem usually contains the connections between home, school, and leisure environments. As an example of mesosystem connections promoting development, they cite the mutual and various contact between parents and teachers (ibid.).

Interesting for this study is the concept of ecological transition (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It refers to a person's change of position from one role or setting to another. Such ecological transitions from one microsystem to another occur naturally throughout a person's life span. Examples are the entrance to primary school after kindergarten or – like in this study – the transition from primary to secondary school. How the transition is experienced depends on the feelings related to it, the persons involved in it, and how it is realized (Klefbeck & Ogden, 2003).

The exosystem can be seen as the outer system, as it refers to environments which the child does not take part in directly, but which still can influence its possibilities for development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Examples are the parents' workplace, a sibling's school, or the infrastructure of a city that determines whether a child can or cannot reach a certain school by public transport.

Finally, the macrosystem can be defined as broad ideological and institutional patterns (Klefbeck & Ogden, 2003) like values, beliefs, traditions or economic conditions existent in a culture or subculture. The macrosystem is the outermost circle in the ecological model. It has influence on all interactions and environments as everything is perceived through the lens of our values and beliefs (Bø, 2000). For example, a political system built on democratic values or a strong belief in Christian religion most likely are related to, and affect, a person's personal values. Also, more universal principals like human rights in general or more specifically the right to education for all children (see 2.3.2) are part of the macrosystem.

The question whether a child attends regular or special school, involves all of the mentioned systems. The mother represents her under-aged child when it comes to the decision for secondary school. I consider it therefore as most purposeful to see both mother and child as a unity in the center of the ecological model.

Before going on to the next chapter, I shortly want to relate to another theory within a systemic perspective, which is the concept of social networks.

Klefbeck and Ogden (2003) distinguish between an informal primary network and a formal secondary network. An informal network includes family, friends, and neighbors; people that know each other and are in close contact with each other. They are the ones who usually provide support in difficult situations. The formal network refers to professionals. Contact with these people does not occur naturally, but is organized. I would include teachers and principals in this group. However, these groups interact and are not rigidly delimited: *the more the primary network [...] has backed out, the more influence gets the secondary network* (Klefbeck & Ogden, 2003, p. 62; translated from Norwegian). Research about networks has shown that what happens between microsystems is of greater relevance for a child's development than what is going on within them (Klefbeck & Ogden, 2003). This finding underlines the key function that Bronfenbrenner (1979) ascribes to mesosystems.

The most central person in a grown-up's life is a longtime partner, in most cases husband or wife (Klefbeck & Ogden, 2003). Research has confirmed that those living together have better mental health than those living alone. To have social support from another grown-up is crucial in difficult situations and decisions. The increased tendency towards divorces and single-parenting increases thus vulnerability because there is no one with whom to discuss problems (ibid.). Keeping this in mind, I take the family situation into consideration when analyzing the data for this study.

2.2 Special socio-emotional needs

In this subchapter, I provide some explanations and classifications of the challenges children with special socio-emotional needs deal with, before briefly addressing their parents' concerns. In this way, both the individuals and one of their microsystems – the parents – are addressed.

2.2.1 Characteristics of children with special socio-emotional needs

Children who have special socio-emotional needs are different from other children in terms of the development of their psychosocial functions. These are classified by the World Health Organization's ICF (International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health) as:

"General mental functions, as they develop over the life span, required to understand and constructively integrate the mental functions that lead to the formation of the interpersonal skills needed to establish reciprocal social interactions, in terms of both meaning and purpose." (WHO, 2001).

However, it is important to note that there is no clear definition of special socio-emotional needs, because all children and youth can at times experience social and emotional difficulties and therefore express age-inappropriate behavior (Befring, 2008; Kirk et al., 2009). What distinguishes children with special socio-emotional needs from other children are the intensity, frequency, duration and context independency of their "problem behavior". However, whether certain behavior is regarded as problematic also depends on the perceiver and his or her attitudes, and is thus, to some extent, subjective (ibid.).

An important distinction when talking about special socio-emotional needs is between the children who externalize their problems, for example, by aggressive behavior and restlessness, and those who internalize their problems, developing, for example, anxiety and depression (Befring, 2008). So-called "externalizers" are the ones who attract most attention, while "internalizers" are at risk for not being noticed in the classroom due to their quietness and shyness. Although research on these quiet children is equally important, the focus of this master's thesis is directed towards the "externalizers" that often stand out in a negative way in their classroom. To shed light on a more diagnostic perspective of the latter's characteristics, I want to refer to another classification instrument by the WHO, the ICD-10. It is used to classify health problems from a medical point of view, in contrast to the ICF that focuses on general body and mental functions instead of deficits. For understanding the different challenges children with special socio-emotional needs deal with, it can however be useful. In the fifth chapter about "Mental and behavioral disorders" and especially in the subchapter entitled "Behavioral and emotional disorders with onset usually occurring in childhood and adolescence" (F90-F98), a range of different problems that children with special socio-emotional needs are likely to face, is described. For instance, according to this definition, hyperkinetic disorders like ADD or ADHD encompass a "lack of persistence in activities that require cognitive involvement, and a tendency to move from one activity to another without completing any one, together with disorganized, ill-regulated, and excessive activity" (WHO, 2010).

They are further associated with emotional or different types of "conduct disorders" (WHO, 2010, F91).

As being irrelevant for this thesis, I will not go further into depth with these diagnostic classifications. Nevertheless, it is it important to show that these children's challenges are classified health problems by the WHO which deserve equal support and respect, especially when taking into consideration that children with problem behavior often are misunderstood, blamed for their situation and have to deal with stigmatization to perhaps a higher extent than children with obvious disorders (Kirk et al., 2009).

As children with problem behavior are in focus of this thesis, I will from now on relate to this group when speaking of "children with special socio-emotional needs".

2.2.2 Parents of children with special socio-emotional needs

Parents of children with problem behavior often have a feeling of failure, a feeling that is likely to be accompanied by low self-esteem in the role as parent. Some parents also experience stigmatization by others (Sætersdal, Dalen, & Tangen, 2008).

These negative feelings can be viewed in relation to the fact that research has shown a connection between the development of socio-emotional problems and the social environment in which the child has grown up. Befring (2008) describes the causes for problem behavior from the point of view of developmental and learning psychology: *the problems are primarily a consequence of the conditions a child has met within its life context* (p. 386; translated from Norwegian). Factors that can lead to the development of problem behavior are a lack of human care and warmth, a lack of good role models, insecurity and missing structure, and a neglect of a child's need to learn basic rules in various life arenas (ibid.).

Although Befring (2008) points out that most kinds of behavior problems can occur during the entire process of growing up and that they often have a cumulative character, it is obvious that many parents feel blamed by these empirical results. Depending on other aspects of their personality, parents tend to react with either retreat and surrender or with anger and opposition.

When it comes to cooperation with, for example, teachers, this group of parents is often perceived as weak or difficult and burdened with more social and economic problems than average parents. It takes a lot of competence on the part of the teachers, who might require

considerable backup themselves, to give these parents the support they need (Sætersdal et al., 2008).

2.3 On the way towards inclusion

The idea of the concept "inclusion" has been touched upon in chapter 1.4.1. Here, I intend to demonstrate national and international policies (2.3.1 and 2.3.2) related to "inclusion" on the one hand, as well as a theoretic definition of "inclusive education" (2.3.3) on the other hand. Subchapter 2.3.3 further includes general statistical data related to the percentages of children with special needs enrolled in Joint Education settings in Germany. The last subchapter (2.3.4) highlights research findings related to the inclusion of children with special socio-emotional needs specifically.

2.3.1 National policy

Legislation in Germany clearly rejects discrimination of people with disabilities or at risk of becoming disabled. According to the German Basic Law, *"*[n]o person shall be disfavoured because of disability*"* (BMJ, 2012, Art. 3 (3)). The country's social policy provisions for this group were enhanced and consolidated by the ninth book of the Social Code entitled *Rehabilitation and Integration of Disabled People* in 2001:

> *"The aim of this legislation is to eliminate disability-related discrimination, promote self-determination for people with disabilities and for those at risk becoming disabled, and aid their equal participation in society by providing targeted assistance (integration assistance)."* (BMAS, 2010, p. 7)

Several acts with similar provisions entered into force in the course of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Among these are the Act on Equal Opportunities of Disabled People (*Behindertengleichstellungsgesetz*, short: BGG) from 2002 and the General Equal Treatment Act (*Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz*, short: AGG) from 2006 (BMAS, 2010).

When it comes to education, it is stated in the Thuringian educational law that every child has the right to access all types of schools, regardless of origin and gender, economic and social status of the parents, or ideological and religious reasons (TMBWK, 2010, Art. 1). However, the law is less unconditional in terms of Joint Education. The main principle in all of the federal school systems today is: as much special education as necessary, as much Joint

Education as possible. In the Thuringian law for special education (TMBWK, 2003), it is formulated in the following way:

Pupils with documented special needs are, as much as possible, educated in regular primary and secondary schools. If they cannot be promoted sufficiently there, even with the support of the Mobile Services for Special Needs Education, they are to be educated in special schools, so that they can achieve school degrees adequate to their abilities and aptitudes. (Art. 1(2); translated and shortened by me)

Inclusive education is, according to this excerpt, restricted by unnamed factors, leaving regular schools the option to deny the education of pupils with special needs. Legal claim for Joint Education thus does not exist, unless one refers to higher ranked laws like the BGG. This is only partly in agreement with international policies ratified by Germany.

2.3.2 International policy

On the international plan, the United Nations and UNESCO have published numerous statements and declarations regarding human rights of people with disabilities. For the purpose of this study, I briefly refer to four of them highlighting the right to education for children with special needs (UN, 1989; 1993; 2006; UNESCO, 1994).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) emphasizes the right of access to education in general for children with special needs (Art. 23 (3)). Three years later, the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities were published. They claim education to happen in integrated settings:

"States should recognize the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary educational opportunities for children, youth and adults with disabilities, in integrated settings." (UN, 1993, rule 6)

Shortly after this convention, a UNESCO conference on Special Needs Education for promoting the objective of Education for All was held in Salamanca, Spain. It resulted in the Salamanca Declaration on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education, which named inclusion in primary, secondary and tertiary education as the main goal of international education policy:

"We believe and proclaim [...] *that those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a childcentred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs"* (UNESCO, 1994, p. viii)

A more recent document is the UN Convention of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006). Article 24 is dedicated to the inclusive schooling for children with special needs. In paragraph 2b, it says:

> *"Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live."*

All of these declarations have been ratified by Germany. However, the formulations in German educational laws allow a considerable larger scope than the international declarations.

2.3.3 Inclusive Education

Hans Wocken, a German professor for Special Needs Education in the field of learning disabilities, has in recent years published a number of articles dealing with the theory and practice of inclusion. In his *guidelines for inclusion* (2010; 2011a), he defines inclusive education in three dimensions: diversity of children, diversity of teaching, and diversity of educators. I will sum up the ideas behind these dimensions in a shortened and simplified way.

Diversity of children refers to an unconditional acceptance of all children without exception as well as to non-selective and non-separated learning groups. *Diversity of teaching* embraces many aspects. The basic idea is that education is free of barriers or discrimination and accessible by all; that is, that it is adapted to both individual and common needs and that resources are exploited. The last dimension, *diversity of educators*, emphasizes an understanding of the teacher as an active supporter in processes of learning, following the golden rule once formulated by Maria Montessori: "Help me to do it myself". Another aspect is the cooperation within a team of educators. (Wocken, 2010; 2011a)

Additionally, Dalen (2006) describes inclusion as a social interaction between one or more persons. Referring to this study, I also regard parents as participants in this interaction.

Another important aspect is that inclusion is a process following a rather ambitious goal (ibid.), which is unlikely to be reached to the full extent in a selective schooling tradition as is present in Germany. Wocken (2011a) states that the foreseeable and expectable future of the German educational system is *partial inclusive* (p. 200; "teilinklusiv"), and that special schools and regular schools will continue to exist parallel to each other (ibid.).

Percentages of children with special needs in Joint Education settings in Germany are provided by Klaus Klemm (2010), a notable educational researcher in Germany, based on statistical evidence from the years 2008 and 2009. He showed that 33.6 % of the children with special needs were enrolled in regular primary schooling in Germany, whereas this percentage declined alarmingly to only 14.9 % in secondary schooling. In Thuringia, only 26.6 % of the children with special needs attended a regular primary school compared to 17.0 % in a regular secondary school (ibid.). These numbers mirror the concern that Joint Education stops after primary school for many children with special needs, and contributed to the focus of this study on secondary schooling.

In his study about the cost-effectiveness of special schools, Klemm (2009) refers to the fact that research has repeatedly affirmed the advantages of Joint Education for the learning outcome of pupils with special needs. One example is Wocken's (2007) study where he raised the question if special school really promotes the pupils' development. He came to the conclusion that special school does not always live up to its own claim of providing the best support for children with special needs, especially for children with learning difficulties. This is also strengthened by the fact that 77.2 % of the pupils in special school do not achieve any school degree (Klemm, 2009). When it comes to the costs of special schools, Klemm (2009) calculated that the expenses for only the salaries of the special needs educators, if spent on Joint Education purposes instead, would allow for ten *additional* hours of weekly support by a special educator in a regular classroom with four pupils with special needs.

2.3.4 Inclusion of children with special socio-emotional needs

Another German professor working in the field of Special Needs Education for children with mental disabilities and children with behavior problems, stated: *There is no alternative to inclusive schooling for pupils with behavior problems.* (Bundschuh, 2006; translated from German). However, the inclusion of this group of pupils is often described as one of the greatest challenges in education today that many teachers feel unable to cope with (Kirk et al., 2009; Preuss-Lausitz, 2005). This is confirmed by numerous empirical studies. Research conducted by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2003) provides an example: One of its main findings was that "**behavior, social and/or emotional problems** are the most challenging within the area of inclusion of pupils with [special educational needs]". Landow (2011) suggests changing the viewpoint in order to solve this

problem. He regards a systemic approach (see 2.1) as the only effective solution, incorporating the assumption that the person with behavior problems is *not* the problem alone.

2.4 Parents' right of school choice

The parents' right of school choice is a significant concept for this study, and it is therefore elaborated upon extensively in this chapter. As a basis, the legal framework is briefly explained in subchapter 2.4.1 and a theoretical approach is provided in subchapter 2.4.2. This is followed by a discussion about the interrelation between the parental right of school choice and a school system that aims at equality of opportunities for all children (2.4.3). To mark the transition to the empirical part of the study, I then present three hypotheses concerning the parents' right of choice as formulated by a parents' initiative in the area under this study (2.4.4).

2.4.1 Legal framework

The right to inclusive education was elaborated on in chapters 2.3.1 and 2.3.2. Here, I briefly clarify what the school legislation says regarding the parents' right of choice.

The school laws in the federal states of Germany treat the transition from primary school to secondary school differently. Who or what is it that decides whether a child will enter a lower secondary school, a higher secondary school, a comprehensive school or a special school after primary school? According to the Thuringian educational law (TMBWK, 2010, Art. 3(1)), the parents are the ones that have the right of choosing the secondary school in accordance with the abilities and achievement of their child. A limitation to the parents' right of choice when it comes to entry into the higher secondary school is expressed in Art. 7(2): Pupils either have to reach certain grades in specific subjects which increase the likelihood of succeeding at the higher secondary school, or they have to pass an entrance test (TMBWK, 2010). For other types of schools, no explicit limitations are mentioned regarding the parents' right of choice.

The teachers' role in the decision process is also defined by law:

> *The school, especially the class teacher, the school counselor and the principal, supports and advises the parents […] in the choice of school career.* (TMBWK, 2010, Art. 3(2); translated from German)

2.4.2 What parents' right of choice actually means

Again, I want to refer to Professor Hans Wocken (2011b) in this subchapter, who has clarified in an outstanding way what a "real" parents' right of choice actually would mean. According to him, it would fulfill four criteria: *self-determination, universal validity, sustainability*, and *extensiveness*.

Self-determination includes not only the legal right of choice or the parents' perception of having a real choice, but also the fact that the choice cannot be changed by a school and school administration afterwards. Taking into consideration the country's commitment to build an inclusive school system, it further involves an obligation for the schools to inform parents about the right of regular schooling and to encourage them to choose regular school options (ibid.). The concept of *universal validity* then claims, in accordance with the democratic principle of equal rights, that all parents, including those of children attending a higher secondary school or those of children attending a special school, must have the right of choice. *Sustainability* means that the parents' choice of school must be valid for the entire duration of primary and/or secondary school. Otherwise, it only would postpone the selection. Finally, the criterion of *extensiveness* requires that parents are informed about and can choose from the entire range of available school types (ibid.).

Wocken acknowledges that these criteria represent idealistic norms, which are nevertheless appropriate for being used as a checking tool for whether a parental right of choice actually exists or not. He further states that *none of the federal states in Germany has a parental right of choice that really deserves this name* (Wocken, 2011b, p. 197; translated from German).

The next subchapter provides a discussion about the eligibility of the parents' right of choice to exist.

2.4.3 Right of choice versus equal opportunities

A basic philosophical discussion about the right of choice in education (Giesinger, 2009) that I want to begin this subchapter with refers to three aspects – it creates *competition* among schools and therefore an increased quality of education; it confirms the parents' *freedom* in the upbringing of their children; and it threatens *educational justice*. Also Brighouse (2008) states (although referring to a different context) that a real right of choice among all kinds of schools, including private schools, is reserved to the rich, which is why educational

opportunities are unequally distributed. However, acknowledging the freedom mentioned by Giesinger (2009), Reich (2007) argues "that the ideal of common schooling and the existence of separate schools, which is to say, the existence of educational choice, are not merely compatible but necessarily co-exist in a liberal democratic society" (p. 709).

In Germany, the selective school system was actually established with the goal to ensure equal educational opportunities (see 1.3.1). Equal opportunities were defined by the independence of the social status and determined by ability or talent. As ability is measured by tests, grades, teacher assessment and entrance examinations, parental participation in the decision of secondary school is originally unnatural. Thus, the different types of school of a selective school system do not necessarily allow any choice (Wocken, 2011b).

Indeed, a lot of recent research has provided evidence that the parents' right of choice results in increased social inequality nationwide (e.g., Tillmann, 2009). According to the findings of Tillmann (2009), a child of parents in academic professions has a 3.8 times larger chance to attend a higher secondary school by the parents' decision than a child of parents in non-academic professions, despite equal intelligence and school achievement. However, it has also been shown that 75 % of the parents (excluding those whose children change to comprehensive school after primary school) follow the recommendations of the primary school when it comes to the decision for type of secondary school (Bellenberg, Hovestadt, & Klemm, 2004). A reason for this might be the communication between parents and teachers during primary school. This means that only 25 % of the parents oppose the school's recommendation. Most of these have a higher social status and decide to send their child to a higher secondary school than what is recommended according to the child's achievements at primary school. Also, the teachers' recommendation can be influenced by the social status of the parents (ibid.).

Do these findings imply that a school system without parental choice would provide more equal opportunities, especially for children with a lower social background?

Wocken (2011b) states that the parental right of choice is dispensable in a totally inclusive school system, because there simply is no choice. In such a system, all children, including those with special needs, would naturally attend the school within their catchment area. There would be no need for applications, official documents on special needs and no limitations in resources. However, as indicated in chapter 2.3.3, a fully inclusive future in Germany is not

expected. In this regard, one can refer to the benefit of the parents' right of choice in terms of inclusion. Wocken (2011b) emphasizes that it is this right of choice that has enabled parents to fight for their children's inclusive schooling since the 1970s. *The parents' right of choice marks a historical stage on the way to inclusion. It surely made integration possible in the first place* (Wocken, 2011b, p. 200; translated from German). Also, Irmtraud Schnell (2006) concludes in her article that it is the parents that are forced to repeatedly push their way through in order to achieve inclusive education for children with disabilities. As long as parallel educational options for children with special needs exist, Wocken (2011b) argues, parents must have the right of choosing the school for their child. He calls the parents' right of choice *a necessary evil* and continues, *not the parents' right of choice should be abolished, but the selective structure (higher secondary school, special school, etc.) itself* (Wocken, 2011b, p. 203; translated from German).

2.4.4 Hypotheses regarding the parents' right of choice

This subchapter serves as a reference to the actual situation in the area under study. Professor Ada Sasse from the *Research Center for Joint Education* is the initiator and key person behind the ongoing project promoting inclusive education in Thuringia since 2003/2004. In her presentation for the Thuringian *Landtag* (state parliament) in 2010, she cited five hypotheses taken from a position paper by a parents' organization[4]. Three of these are presented below:

1. *Parents should be prepared to take legal action for Joint Education.*
2. *Parents of children with special needs are mostly counseled insufficiently in terms of Joint Education.*
3. *Non academic parents do not possess the competence to make the right decision for Joint Education.*

(Thüringer Forschungs- und Arbeitsstelle für den Gemeinsamen Unterricht, 2010; translated from German and adapted by me)

[4] The primary source was unfortunately not available any more. I am also aware of the fact that empirical data supporting (or weakening) these hypotheses would have increased the validity of this study. Although I was unable to detect such data I decided to include these hypotheses in favor of a direct reference to the area under study.

In addition to the political documents, theoretical approaches, and empirical evidence provided in this chapter, these hypotheses will also be taken into consideration in the analysis of the data collected in my study. In the following chapter, the use of research methodology in this study is presented and elaborated in depth.

3 Methodology

This chapter is about the methodological approach chosen for this study in order to find answers to the research problem and subquestions:

How is the decision for regular or special school at the secondary level made for children with special socio-emotional needs?

- Who are the key contributors to the decision and how do they affect the process?
- Which key criteria do mothers emphasize in their evaluation of the different school types and how?

Subchapter 3.1 deals with the main characteristics of qualitative research and my reasons for choosing this design. The method for data collection I used for the study is qualitative interviews, which I elaborate in the second subchapter (3.2). Subsequently, the process of sampling (3.3) as well as the preparation and procedures of the data collection (3.4) are explained. After an introduction to the analysis approach used in this study (3.5), this chapter is completed by presenting reflections on the quality issues of validity and reliability (3.6) as well as on ethical considerations (3.7).

3.1 Qualitative research design

Qualitative research is an in-depth study of a phenomenon. *A main goal for qualitative research is to develop an understanding of phenomena related to people and situations in their own social reality* (Dalen, 2004, p. 16; translated from Norwegian).

My focus on mothers' voices determined the choice of a qualitative approach: "We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories [and] hear their voices […]" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). This refers to one of the main characteristics of qualitative research formulated by Creswell (2007) which is the *participants' meanings*. My research intends to shed light on mothers' experiences with the decision for school type for their child with special socio-emotional needs. The main focus is on the transition between primary and secondary school. It is the informants' perspective that is of greatest interest for my study, also called the emic perspective (Gall et al., 2007). However, it is the researcher's

own perspective (called the etic perspective) that helps her[5] to "make conceptual and theoretical sense of [the study], and to report the findings so that their contribution to the research literature is clear" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 451).

I came to the conclusion that the phenomenon under study is a rather complex and sensitive process which is experienced differently by dissimilar individuals. Thick descriptions, rather than numerical results, are therefore considered to be necessary to achieve better understanding. According to Gall et al. (2007), thick descriptions are "statements that recreate a situation and as much of its context as possible, accompanied by the meanings and intentions inherent in that situation" (p. 451).

The research process of a qualitative study typically is *emergent* (Creswell, 2007). The researcher has the freedom to modify her plan according to the insights gained during the process. For instance, I adapted the research questions of this study until I found that they expressed precisely the informants' experiences and views on the examined topics. A *holistic account* is maintained by listening to the voices of mothers with different experiences of the same phenomenon as well as by taking the cultural background into consideration. More characteristics of qualitative design formulated by Creswell (2007) are elaborated throughout this chapter.

In brief, a qualitative design allows me "to get at the inner perspective of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 12). Since "variables" is a term highly related to quantitative research, I used categories in the analysis instead.

3.2 Qualitative interview as research method

By using qualitative research interviews as the data collection method, I intended to view the world from the participants' point of view and to shed light on their individual experiences. Kvale and Brinkmann (2010) characterize the qualitative research interview as *a unique opportunity to get access to and to be able to describe the everyday life world* of the interviewees (p. 48; translated from Norwegian). The purpose of a qualitative interview is to collect deep and descriptive information about how people experience various dimensions of

[5] Only female pronouns are applied for the researcher in this study regarding my own gender and in order to ease the reading flow.

their life situation in order to gain insight into their experiences, feelings and thoughts (Dalen, 2004).

The original meaning of the term *interview* (from French *entrevue*) is the exchange of viewpoints between two persons in a conversation about a topic of interest for both. In the course of this interplay, knowledge is produced (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). Dalen (2004) says that listening and receiving are processes that create something. The role of the researcher is therefore crucial in a qualitative interview situation, and it is clear that the more knowledge about the phenomenon under study a researcher possesses before meeting her informants, the more she will be able to respond and interact in order to produce knowledge. This is called *pre-understanding* (Dalen, 2004, p. 18: "førforståelse"). Creswell (2007) defines the researcher as the *key instrument* of a qualitative study. As such, she has responsibility and power. One of her challenges is to differentiate between pre-understanding and preconceived judgments. The key prerequisite is to have a deep insight into the field, but still be open-minded regarding the stories of the informants.

The type of interview I use in my study is called the "**semistructured interview"** by Gall et al. (2007, p. 246). Although they discuss the term in the context of quantitative interviews, I decided to use it for qualitative interviews, too, having the support of other researchers like Dalen (2004) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2010). The latter explain that *an interview is semistructured when it is neither an open conversation nor a closed survey* (p. 47; translated from Norwegian). It is meant to provide reasonable standard data across respondents and at the same time, allow for follow-up questions and in-depth answers (Gall et al., 2007). To achieve this, the questions are standardized by an interview guide to a certain extent, but kept open enough for the informants to tell their stories when they come to mind. The order of the questions is not predetermined. See chapter 3.4.1 for a more detailed description of the interview guide.

3.3 Sampling of informants

Seven qualitative interviews were conducted for this study. The different sampling approaches I used to ensure a broad and interesting sample of informants are described in this chapter.

3.3.1 Sampling

Sampling in qualitative studies usually is purposeful. Gall et al. (2007) define: "In **purposeful sampling** the goal is to select cases that are likely to be 'information-rich' with respect to the purposes of the study" (p. 178).

I used three purposeful sampling strategies in my study. In Thuringia, the federal state under study, the numbers of students with disabilities attending special schools have for many years been considerably higher than the average in Germany (Helbig, 2009; Preuss-Lausitz, 2005). However, lately there is a new development in the education of children with special needs due to the political ambitions of the federal state to forward inclusion as it was agreed upon in the UN convention. I therefore consider the choice of the area of study as "politically important" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 181). Nevertheless, a personal interest was involved as well. Since I have grown up and attended school in one of the western federal states formerly belonging to the FRG, I wanted to use the opportunity to explore another school system. However, this circumstance led to the need for comprehensive research prior to the field work in order to improve my pre-understanding. The purposes for the selection of the city[6] for the conduct of the study are (1) the representation of an average level of wealth and employment within the federal state[7] and (2) a sufficient size and availability of different school types.

Stratified purposeful sampling (ibid.) resulted in four schools (two special schools, one lower regular school and one comprehensive regular school). I wanted to obtain an equal distribution of special schools and regular schools. However, higher regular schools or non-public schools were not approached in the sampling process in order to limit the scope of the study.

Finally, in cooperation with the schools, informants were sampled with the help of criteria (ibid.) for their children:

1. the child has officially documented special socio-emotional needs which result in behavior problems at school
2. the child is in grade 6 or older
3. the child attended a regular primary school from grade 1-4
4. the child has attended either a special school or a regular school since grade 5

[6] Due to confidentiality reasons, the city is not mentioned by name in this study.
[7] Reference removed due to confidentiality reasons.

The first criterion ensured that all parents had been through the process of gaining awareness about their child's problems. In most cases, the report they received about the special needs of their child brought challenges in terms of schooling after primary school.

Being in grade 6 or older means that the parents and the child have experiences with the school for at least one year, because grade 5 is the first year of secondary school in Germany and the interviews were conducted in the beginning of a new school year. I chose to focus on children at the secondary school level because statistics clearly show that Joint Education is more likely to take place in primary than in secondary schools (see 2.3.3). This is probably due to the fact that separation after grade 4 according to the children's abilities has been, and still is, common practice. I considered it therefore even more important to come closer to this disadvantaged group. However, the fact that some of the informants' children already attended 9th grade may have led to slightly skewed results. One mother mentioned explicitly that it was not easy to remember all the details of the school decision after so many years. Another threat to validity (see 3.6) may lie in the fact that the idea of Joint Education and inclusion has started to spread more and more in the past few years, even though the project was launched in the school year 2003/04 (see 1.3.2). Children attending the 6th grade are therefore slightly more likely to follow a regular education than children in the 9th grade.

Children who satisfied the third and fourth criterion had experience in regular school at least for the time of primary school (grade 1-4) and then changed schools at the regular time. This is important because many children with special needs would change to a special school earlier, shortly after their needs were discovered and officially documented.

No direct criteria for the respective parents were employed because I did not intend to predetermine the selection. This is also the reason why I decided to establish contact via schools and not via, for instance, parent initiatives. Whereas all children go to school, certain characteristics might be connected to parents that join a parent initiative. Instead of predetermining the selection, characteristics and background of the informants are explored and included in the presentation of results (see 4.1.2). Mothers were originally not given preference by me. The selection of informants depended thus on the criteria for the children, the cooperation of their school, and the parents' willingness to participate in the study.

3.3.2 Gaining access to informants

The first step in gaining access to informants was to seek permission from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services and the local education authority in Germany. Approval from the German authority was especially necessary before proceeding because it relied on a number of schools that were appointed and informed beforehand by the authority. Dalen (2004) refers to people or institutions in a controlling position as "gatekeepers" who decide whether the researcher may enter the field or not. The first gatekeeper in my study was therefore the school authority. The following gatekeepers, the principals of the schools, were significant. As the ongoing changes in the regional school system are an enormous challenge for the involved schools, all six principals I contacted reacted with skepticism to various extents. I first explained my interest to them in an e-mail and then called before I visited four of them in school to establish personal contact. Two of them had already declined to help by this time. I gave sheets of written information to the remaining four and kindly asked them for their assistance. All of them gave their consent for establishing contact between me and one to three parents, although some did so rather unhappily. The contact with these gatekeepers demanded a great amount of sensitivity, which is why I decided to adapt to their conditions to make them feel more comfortable. This means that I did not attend parent-teacher conferences in all schools, nor did I have the chance to observe all children in their classes, nor was I in personal contact with all parents before meeting them for the interview. However, I focused on the cooperation with the principals, explained the criteria to them carefully, and attended two parent-teacher conferences, observed classes in two schools, and spoke to several teachers.

Although the selection of informants was determined by the principals' and other teachers' cooperation, the number of children that matched the criteria was fairly small. This is why I can say with confidence that there is no greater risk than usual that the principals chose parents that were influenced by him or her.

3.3.3 Sampling results

The search for informants demanded patience and endurance. I succeeded in finding seven instead of the expected six parents. All informants happened to be mothers, a fact which led to a change of the research questions. The parents' voices were delimited to the mothers' voices.

All seven children were boys and met the sampling criteria of having officially documented special socio-emotional needs which result in behavior problems at school.

Five sons also met the three remaining sampling criteria, whereas two others first attended a regular secondary school before changing to special school. The latter were considered as equally significant cases of interest because changes of school types that take place *later* than after primary school indicate an even longer and thus more complex process of choosing an adequate school. Another deviance is that an application for school change from regular to special school had been submitted for one of the sons at the time of the interview.

3.4 Preparation and conduction of data collection

In this chapter, I want to highlight the process of interviewing. I start by describing the development of the interview guide (3.4.1), which was then tested with a pilot study (3.4.2) and consequently revised. The conduction of the data collection is illustrated in chapter 3.4.3, followed by a short remark on the transcription process.

3.4.1 The interview guide[8]

Before I could start to work on the interview guide, it was necessary that I gained an extensive knowledge about the field in order to assess how the life situation of the informants would be like. I read actual newspaper articles published in the area under study as well as relevant theory. Moreover, I spoke to some teachers as well as other professionals and visited a school during the preparation of my study. In this way, I slowly got a better idea of the actual school situation for children with special socio-emotional needs in Thuringia. Then I formulated concrete research questions that in my opinion reflected an important and interesting aspect within the field of study. Finally, by always having these questions and also the title of the thesis in front of me, I was ready to start developing the interview guide (Dalen, 2004).

"An **interview guide** specifies the questions, the sequence in which they are to be asked, and guidelines for what the interviewer is to say at the beginning and end of each interview." (Gall et al., 2007, p. 250). Even though the sequence might be changed during the course of an interview, it is still good for the researcher to have guidelines that she can use to get back on track and not overlook important questions.

[8] See Appendix 1a & b

My interview guide started with a short presentation of myself. This was followed by a repetition of the purpose of the study and especially of confidentiality matters, although all mothers had received both oral and written information and signed a letter of consent[9] at least several days before the interview. The introduction ended by giving the informants the opportunity to ask questions and by asking for permission to contact them again in case of follow-up questions.

For the interview guide itself, the *funnel principal* (Dalen, 2004, p. 30: "traktprinsippet") was used. This means that the first questions in the interview guide serve to establish rapport between the researcher and the informant and help the informant to relax in the unusual interview situation. The questions then gradually focus more and more on central and often sensitive topics. Towards the end, the questions open up to be more general again and make sure not to leave the informant in the middle of his or her most difficult thoughts. I realized this principle by first moving from general to specialized questions in the interview guide: about the family, then more explicitly about the child, then focused on the child's problems. After this rather long preparation, the two main parts of the interview guide followed, that is, the questions about the schooling of the child from the beginning to now in a chronological order, and about the experience at the present school. To move away again from the most sensitive topics, a part about future perspectives was included. The last question about a special talent of the child aimed at making the mother think of something less problematic in her child's life before leaving the interview situation. The interview guide ended with another possibility to ask questions or to add something before I thanked for the interview.

Dalen (2004) states that all topics and questions in an interview guide have to be relevant to shed light on the research problem. In my interview guide, not all questions were directly relevant related to my research questions, but they were of a different relevance, which is the establishment of rapport. I therefore want to highlight the indirect relevance of some of the questions in the interview guide. Curiosity for the informants' narratives as well as sensitivity and naivety most likely help the informant to build up trust in the researcher, reflect and talk freely (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). However, I later understood the benefits of a shorter and more precise interview guide, facilitating not only the transcriptions, but, most importantly, the analysis.

[9] See Appendix 2 a & b

The use of a simple language in the interview guide intended to reduce the possible distance between researcher and informant. Of course, the interview guide was written in the mother tongue of the informants, German. During the work with the interview guide, I paid attention to formulate the questions in a way that released thick descriptions of the phenomenon (see 3.1). Instead of yes or no questions, I tried to implement open questions like "Please describe…", Can you tell me about…?" and "How…?" to make sure that I get more complete answers.

3.4.2 Pilot study

It is quite useful to conduct a pilot study before starting to interview the informants for two reasons. First, testing out the interview guide can help the researcher see weaknesses like missing questions, biased questions, an inadequate question order, problematic formulations, and so on (Gall et al., 2007). After such a pilot interview, it can therefore be necessary to revise the interview guide. A second benefit of a pilot interview is that the researcher, especially an inexperienced one, gets the chance to test herself in an interview situation. Doing so, the use of a recorder is important, on the one hand to listen to the recordings and get an idea of one's own behavior during the interview, and on the other hand to simply test the technical equipment, so that hopefully no grave mistakes are made later. As I pointed out earlier (see 3.2), the researcher is the crucial factor in a qualitative interview study, that is, her knowledge, experience, honesty and fairness are vitally important (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). To practice the *handicraft* (ibid.) of interviewing is consequently also a matter of validity (see 3.6).

Prior to conducting the seven interviews for my study, I pre-tested my interview guide with the help of one pilot interview. After failing to arouse the interest of other mothers in the schools under study, I finally managed to establish contact to one mother via a parents' initiative in another city not far away. I got exactly one positive answer to my request. As a result of this pilot interview, I changed the interview guide quite significantly. For instance, I made a separate chapter about the child's problems (question 3) because I felt that there was a great need to talk about this topic. I also changed some formulations and added questions searching more deeply for the personal opinions and reflections of the informants. However, I realized during the data analysis that some of the adjustments I made were not directed

entirely to the research questions. Another revision of the guide with respect to the decision process itself would have been an advantage.

Nevertheless, listening to the recordings gave me insight in my style of interviewing. Even though I have had some experience from an earlier job and practiced a couple of interviews with fellow students, I noticed that I should reduce the pace even more and wait for the answers of the informants even longer.

3.4.3 Conducting the interviews

I called the informants in order to arrange a date and time for the interview. When possible, this was done on the informants' premises. Creswell (2007) emphasizes that qualitative studies are conducted in *natural settings*. All mothers agreed on conducting the interview in their home and assured that it was possible to talk undisturbed. I made sure that none of the informants felt uncomfortable with this solution. Some informants seemed quite happy to invite me and served coffee or even cake, which contributed to the non-threatening atmosphere I was eager to achieve. Interruptions that nevertheless occurred by other family members, did not last long. The fact that I had met four of the seven mothers at the school conferences beforehand, made the start of the interview easier. In the other three cases, I spent more time on small talk and repeated the purpose of the study even more thoroughly prior to the interview. I did not notice any disadvantages in the conversations with these mothers. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2010) point out, the first minutes of an interview predetermine the course of it. I would even widen this by saying that the first impressions of the researcher, the first words that are exchanged before the interview, are of great importance. Being aware of this, I paid attention to my way of speaking and listening even on the phone. For instance, I showed empathy and patience when one informant had to cancel our meeting for the third time because of her health.

During the interviews, I noticed that some mothers needed encouragement when talking about difficult topics. I repeatedly assured them of my confidentiality, encouraged them to speak openly, and underlined that it was only their experiences and opinions I was interested in. In general, being aware of our unequal positions (Dalen, 2004), sensitivity and empathy played a greater role in all interviews than following a rigid framework of questions and time. It took me a few interviews before I learned to appreciate this development. First, I was afraid to ask additional questions and lose track, but later on, I deliberately asked follow-up questions to

show my interest and involvement. I focused on being an active listener, but avoided displaying personal attitudes and loosing track. I accepted the additional work this required demeanor created for me, because it released thicker descriptions. When the interviews took longer than expected, I asked the informants for their approval, which they gave in all cases. The interviews were between 60 and 106 minutes long.

After finishing the interviews, I made sure to have enough time to end my visit in a comfortable way. Dalen (2004) explains that the informants have a better feeling about the interview if the researcher does not rush away immediately when it is over. Instead, I tried to engage in some small talk before leaving. In one case, I asked a mother to wait with serving coffee and cake until the interview was finished, and this led to a relaxed ending.

The transcriptions were done in a successive way – once I returned from one informant, I sat down to transcribe the interview as soon as possible for reasons of validity. Fortunately, I had no problems with my recordings and was able to transcribe each interview in its entirety.

Before I ended the period of data collection, I contacted two of the informants again by phone because of ambiguities I discovered when doing the transcriptions. However, I did not conduct follow-up interviews with the other informants. The reasons for this are that I found the amount of data sufficient and that no relevant problems of understanding occurred in the transcription process. I also felt a barrier asking more questions because most of the mothers expressed that they were very busy and seemed happy for having finished talking about the various problems they had faced.

Performing the time-consuming work of transcription by myself and without technical support gave me the opportunity to get to know my data very well. This is an advantage according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2010). They also point out the difference between written text and speech, which is present even if the researcher does the transcriptions very carefully. I considered this fact in the analysis.

The 165 pages of transcriptions were supplemented by field notes I made during the interviews and seven sheets of brief handwritten impressions I had written down immediately after each interview.

3.5 Analysis of the data

To detect the informants' perceptions related to the phenomenon under study, I applied an interpretational form of analysis based on the principles of hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics is a philosophical discipline which has its main focus on the interpretation of meaning. It assumes that all human beings are constantly engaged in processes of interpretation and that an objective reality does not exist. Creswell (2007) refers to the crucial role of the researcher: "The researcher's interpretations cannot be separated from their own background, history, context, and prior understandings." (p. 39). The *hermeneutic circle* is a principle that describes how we interpret texts: It can be understood as a "continuous process of alternating between interpreting the meaning of each part of the text and the text as a whole" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 521). In order to find meaning, the researcher goes back and forth within the data, but also takes the context into account: *Any text gets its meaning from its context* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 70; translated from Norwegian).

An *inductive* approach to *data analysis* (Creswell, 2007) is another characteristic of qualitative research. Categories are found from the "bottom-up", that is, they are not determined beforehand, but emergent from the data. In this way, the data can be organized in "more abstract units of information" (Creswell, 2007, p. 38), and subsequently, one arrives at more general perspectives related to the phenomenon. "A **category** is a construct that refers to a certain type of phenomenon mentioned in the database" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 467). The researcher develops categories by determining "which phenomena share sufficient similarities that they can be considered instances of the same construct" (ibid.). Dalen (2004) warns against not coming further than to the stage of summarizing in this process. The purpose is to find *categories that give opportunities to understand the content on a more interpretive and theoretical level* (p. 69; translated from Norwegian).

I now want to shed light on the steps of analysis taken in this study for the benefit of an increased reliability. The process of analysis started during the process of transcription (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). On an irregular basis, I wrote down similarities I noticed and other ideas that came to my mind. After all interviews had been conducted, I listened to all interviews again and wrote down keywords, taking into account the difference between speech and written text (see 3.4.3). The result was two pages of significant key words for each interview. These 14 pages gave me an overview and helped me not to lose track when I then

started with the coding of the transcriptions. Next, I printed out the interviews and read them carefully. I divided them into thematic segments and wrote a short summary of each segment in the margin. I also highlighted statements that were significant related to the research questions.

The next step was the development of categories. The interview guide was not adequate as a basis for formulating categories as it approached the phenomenon from a narrative angle. This is why I explored the data inductively and organized them in various ways until I felt that the relevant data were represented appropriately in main categories, each of them including subcategories. More information on this process is given in chapter 4.2.

3.6 The study's quality

To prove whether the results of a study are of value or not, two concepts are central: validity and reliability. In this chapter, these concepts are going to be elaborated on both theoretically and with reference to this study.

In qualitative research, there are no precise standard methods to measure validity and reliability of a study like in quantitative research (Dalen, 2004). However, the researcher has certain opportunities to ensure the quality of her study.

Validity in qualitative research is "the extent to which the research uses methods and procedures that ensure a high degree of research quality and rigor" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 657). Kvale and Brinkmann (2010) say more generally that is has to do with the question whether an interview study really examines what it is supposed to examine. In this regard, the researcher must be careful to keep track and respond to the research problem throughout the study.

The significance of the researcher in the process of a qualitative study has been elaborated upon earlier. Furthermore, she can influence the validity of the study in all stages – when designing and planning it, when collecting and analyzing the data, and finally, when reporting the study. First, the question of why she decided to go into exactly this field and whether she is personally involved or not, can help others to evaluate the validity of the results (Dalen, 2004). In chapter 1.2, I explained that I am not personally involved in the topic. However, I do have a positive attitude towards inclusion, and I am rather skeptical towards the separation

of children into different kinds of schools. Being aware of my own attitudes was very important before going out in the field, and I was extremely attentive to be open-minded in the entire research process. When working with the interview guide or during the actual interviews, I especially paid attention not to use biased questions; that is, I avoided using questions that led the respondents towards a particular response colored by my own attitudes. Pre-testing the interview guide was a valuable method to avoid bias (Gall et al., 2007), because it gave me the possibility to check how the respondent reacted to the questions being asked. Personally, I got the feeling that laying aside my opinions gave me the opportunity to gain much deeper insights, because my informants opened up to me. In general, my priority was to gain my informants' trust (see 3.4.3) and reach *intersubjectivity* (Dalen, 2004). Intersubjectivity is a precondition in qualitative research. It means that the researcher's interpretations of the informant's experience are influenced by the relation between researcher and informant (ibid.). In other words, a positive relation has a positive impact on the researcher's ability to interpret and therefore strengthens the study's validity (ibid.).

In order to increase theoretical validity (Dalen, 2004), I would have liked to have explored former research more thoroughly before conducting the study. Being able to relate my findings to the findings of another qualitative study of the same or similar phenomenon would have strengthened the quality of my study. Although I knew about the benefit of other empirical data before I conducted the study, I did not become aware of its real value before analyzing the data. Unfortunately, I was unable to detect these data later, as research (e.g. master theses) is less accessible in Germany as in Norway. This might be regarded as a limitation of this study. However, I used primarily quantitative research findings to balance this shortcoming.

Another validation strategy often named for qualitative studies (e.g. by Creswell, 2007) – the use of *multiple sources of data* – is not applied in this study. This delimitation to one research method can also affect the validity of the study negatively. However, interviews were the most obvious method to use regarding the purpose of the study. Being an inexperienced researcher, I decided to concentrate fully on one method and be as accurate as possible in the collection and analysis of the data because I believe that validity is to a high extent dependent on the researcher's accuracy. During the interviews, I often asked a question twice or again in a different way. This gave the informant the opportunity to reflect upon her words and I could prove whether I had understood her correctly or whether there were ambiguities in her

statements. In two cases, I felt the necessity to contact the informants again to clarify some issues. Recording the interviews in a good quality, doing the transcriptions immediately after the interviews, and constantly using the research questions in the analysis process are other aspects that contributed to the validity of my study. For further validating the transcriptions, I could have asked the informants to check them for accuracy. However, I did not consider this to be necessary since all informants made clear that they relied on my work.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2010) describe seven stages of validation (pp. 253-254), starting with finding the topic and ending with reporting the study. Although not all of these stages are elaborated upon here, it is important to keep in mind that validity plays a role in all phases of the research process.

When it comes to the so-called *external validity*, or generalizing (Dalen, 2004), qualitative research cannot be assessed in the same way as quantitative research because of smaller samples and a less representative character. However, I tried to cover a wide range of mothers with a wide range of experiences in my sample in order to represent variation. Even if the results cannot be transferred to a whole population, one can assume that they show tendencies, and that a reader who is familiar with the phenomenon under study, can identify himself or herself with the interpretations described in the report. Kvale and Brinkmann (2010) call this *naturalistic generalization* (p. 266; "naturalistisk generalisering").

"**Reliability** is the extent to which other researchers would arrive at similar results if they studied the same case using exactly the same procedures as the first researcher." (Yin as cited in Gall et al., 2007, p. 477). Earlier in this study, the role of the researcher was elaborated on, and that this role unfolds individually through the interplay with the informants and the situation (Dalen, 2004). I tried to give exact descriptions of each step in the research process, so that other researchers can reconstruct my proceedings as much as possible. These descriptions must include information about the researcher, the informants, and the interview situation, as well as the analytical methods applied to interpret the data (ibid.). Time, for instance, is an aspect that reduces reliability. When I conducted the interviews, two of the seven mothers were very insecure regarding the future schooling of their child because of recent developments. Even in the rather short time span between getting consent from the mothers and conducting the interviews, changes had occurred. A situational change can, as a consequence, affect the informants' attitudes and thoughts and thus the results of a study.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues are always present in research, especially in qualitative research like this study, which has a close focus on individuals. It is therefore important to protect the privacy of the participants (Gall et al., 2007). Dalen (2004) emphasizes three main demands that are placed upon the researcher: consent, information, and confidentiality. This is in agreement with the confirmations given to both the Norwegian Social Science Data Services[10] and the local school authority in the city under study in Germany[11]. Written and oral information were given to school principals first. With their oral consent, I proceeded to inform the informants both in written and oral form. No interview was conducted before written consent was given. The questions in the interview guide were also approved by both authorities.

During the field work, I paid attention to store the data in a way that it was not accessible to others. In addition, a list of informants was held separate from the actual transcriptions. All informants were ensured confidentiality and anonymity (Gall et al., 2007).

In addition to these rather formal considerations, I experienced a few situations that challenged my ethics. The topic of the study can be emotionally loaded due to the experiences the family has had. The researcher must be aware of the fact that mothers are likely to be vulnerable when talking about the difficulties of their children. Therefore, the researcher's ability to show empathy and understanding, as well as creating a non-threatening interview-situation, is crucial. Assuring confidentiality and explaining my interests carefully, before the interview and also in the information sheet, helped reduce the mothers' fear of stigma or of a judgment about their success or failure as parents. There were interview situations where the informant was rather emotional. Nobody burst out in tears, but some spoke with a shaky voice or another one became really upset. It was not always easy to stay objective in such a situation, and it was also an ethical question: Is it better to show support or to stay neutral? The same is valid for conversations I had with principals and teachers. When teachers complained about all the changes in the school system and principals of special schools about their declining number of pupils, I tried to be a good listener without judging. To have an open mind is, in my experience, one of the most important abilities a researcher could have.

[10] See Appendix 3
[11] See Appendix 4

4 Presentation of results

In this chapter, my goal is to reflect as much as possible the emic perspective of the informants (see 3.1). The findings of the data collection answering the research question and subquestions are presented in categories and subcategories that emerged from the interview transcriptions and field notes (4.2). Prior to that, introductory descriptions of the different school types (4.1.1) and of the overall situations of each informant and child (4.1.2) are provided. These are contextual findings which I considered to be relevant in order to meet the heterogeneity of the sample, briefly touched upon in chapter 3.3.3.

For reasons of confidentiality, I refer to my informants as "Mothers 1-7". Accordingly, their children are named "Sons 1-7".

4.1 Introductory descriptions

My goal to provide thick descriptions of the phenomenon under study includes the provision of a contextual understanding. The different school types and the general situation of the informants are therefore described in the succeeding sections.

4.1.1 Presenting the schools

As described in the methodology chapter, all informants were found via the schools of their sons. In this section, I want to give a short description of the involved schools in order to ease understanding for the reader. The descriptions are based on facts obtained either by information by the school itself, by legislation or by the informants.

Usually, pupils attend (according to their abilities) either the lower secondary school or the higher secondary school of their catchment area after fulfilling the 4th grade of primary school. The term "catchment area" expresses that a pupil attends the school next to which he or she lives. Those schools are obligated to accept the respective pupil. If, however, parents want their child to attend another school for different reasons, they have the possibility to submit a so-called guest school application. A guest school can accept or refuse to teach a pupil.

Two of the sons attend a regular lower secondary school. One special educator is employed to take care of the children with special needs at the school. The pupils can obtain a lower school degree after the 9th grade or a middle school degree after the 10th grade. Typically, children of the school's catchment area are taught here, but guest school applications are possible.

One of the sons attends a regular comprehensive school. Each class has 24 pupils, two of whom have special needs. A special educator supports these pupils when necessary. All degrees can be obtained at this school, including the qualification for university entrance after thirteen years. The school has selection procedures for pupils including an application and intake interview.

Four of the sons attend a special school. In a special school, there is the possibility to obtain a lower school degree. Special schools in Germany are often specified according to the disabilities of the pupils. Learning disabilities and behavior problems are usually combined in one type of special school. However, there are different classes within the special school, that is, classes that are taught according to the regular curriculum for pupils with mainly behavior problems, and classes taught according to the special school curriculum with mainly learning disorders. Three sons are enrolled in classes with a regular curriculum. Another one – son 4 – remains a pupil of his regular school, but currently attends a special class within the special school for a small number of pupils that are temporarily removed from other teaching settings. The goal is, however, to go back to regular teaching after a certain period of time.

4.1.2 Presenting the informants

The descriptions provided in this section intend to give a short general insight into the situation of each informant and her child in order to describe the diversity among them. They are oriented at three main points: family situation; special needs of the child; and age, grade and type of school of the child.

Mother 1 has three sons. The mother's first husband is the father of the two older ones. Her second husband is the father of son 1, her youngest son at twelve years of age. The oldest brother has moved out, and son 1 lives together with his mother, his father, and his other brother in an apartment in the city. Both parents have a non-academic job; the mother works part-time, the father is self-employed. While the other sons had few problems at school, son 1 has had learning difficulties from the 1st grade on. ADHD was diagnosed in the 4th grade. Son

1 changed to regular secondary school after primary school. He attended 6th grade in a regular class at the time of the interview, and is assessed according to the special school curriculum.

In the case of mother 2 and her son, special school was never even considered, neither by herself nor by the teachers working with her son. The parents are married and both are employed full-time or nearly full-time in academic professions. The elder sister of son 2 is currently studying abroad, so son 2 lives now with his parents alone in an apartment close to the city center. After a life-threatening illness and surgery at four years of age, son 2 developed obsessive-compulsory behaviors which increased severely in the 4th grade. Although it was never diagnosed, an expert review assumed that his problems are attributed to Autism Spectrum Disorders, more precisely Asperger syndrome. Son 2 is now 14 years old and attends the 8th grade of a regular comprehensive school.

Mother 3 and her twelve-year-old son have a minority background. The two of them live in an apartment in the city center. There is no contact with the father, and mother 3 has been alone since the break-up with another long-time partner when her son was in the 2nd grade. Mother 3 works full-time in a job with varying and often late working-hours because it was the only job she could find. Son 3 has had a depression after the break-up between his mother and her partner, and was diagnosed with ADD at that time, too. He displays serious behavior problems in school. Although he was attending the 6th grade of a regular school at the time the interview was conducted, it became clear during the interview that the situation was about to be changed, because an application for special school had already been sent.

Mother 4 lives together with son 4 in an apartment in the city. There are no other siblings, and she has been separated from the son's father, who has established another family, for ten years. She has been a single mother ever since. There is some contact with the father, who is unemployed. Mother 4 works on an irregular basis, mainly on the weekends. Son 4 was twelve years old and attended 6th grade when the interview was conducted. He was diagnosed with ADHD in the 3rd grade and has dyslexia. From the start of the ongoing school year, he has been enrolled in a special program remaining a pupil of his regular school, but attending classes in special school. The program is framed to a time limit of one year and a return to regular class is expected.

Son 5 is 14 years old and is the only child of mother 5 and her husband. The parents are married, and both have a non-academic full-time job. All three live together in a privately

owned home outside the city. Son 5 has always displayed problem behavior, and ADHD and dyslexia were diagnosed in early primary school. Additionally, he started to develop severe obsessive-compulsory behavior which resulted in three stays in a hospital. Consequently, son 5 had to repeat[12] two school years in regular school before changing to special school, where he is presently enrolled in the 7th grade.

Mother 6 is a single mother and lives with her two sons in an apartment in the city. Son 6 is 15 years old and attends the 9th grade of a special school. The father established a new family six years ago, a fact that son 6 has had difficulties accepting until now. Both parents are unemployed except for the mother's temporary work on an irregular basis. As his elder brother has ADHD, son 6 was observed carefully since infancy and diagnosed with ADHD at preschool age when being enrolled in a regular kindergarten. After attending a regular primary school, however, son 6 changed to special school.

Mother 7 has been married for many years. They live in a house in a rural area outside the city together with their daughter and the younger son. Her husband lost his job at an advanced age and has been unemployed since. Mother 7 works part-time in a non-academic job. Son 7 never received a clear diagnosis, but has been suspected to be hyperactive and to have learning deficits by primary school teachers. He has documented special needs in the field of behavior. After fulfilling 4th grade, he changed to special school. Son 7 was 16 years old and attended 9th grade at the time of the interview.

Table 1 aims at providing an overview for better orientation throughout the analysis (see next page).

The informants can be grouped in the following way:

1. Mothers with a child at regular secondary school since 5th grade (sons 1 + 2)
2. Mothers with a child who changed or is going to change from regular to special school later during secondary school age (sons 3-5)
3. Mothers with a child in special school since 5th grade (sons 6 + 7)

[12] It is another characteristic of the German school systems that pupils have to repeat a school year, unlike for instance in Norway, if their grades remain below a certain defined level.

	Age	Grade	Type of school when interview (autumn 2011)	Schooling history
Son 1	12 years	6th grade	regular lower school	Regular secondary after primary school
Son 2	14 years	8th grade	regular comprehensive school	Regular secondary after primary school
Son 3	12 years	6th grade	regular lower school	Regular secondary after primary school; change to special school imminent
Son 4	12 years	6th grade	regular/special school	Regular secondary after primary school; temporarily enrolled in a program at special school
Son 5	14 years	7th grade	special school	Regular secondary after primary school; change to special school in 7th grade
Son 6	15 years	9th grade	special school	Special school after primary school
Son 7	16 years	9th grade	special school	Special school after primary school

Table 1: Overview about the sons' age, grade, current school type, and schooling history.

4.2 Categories

Finding categories was a challenging process characterized by thinking back and forth many times between the data and the research questions. The key task was to formulate categories that reveal answers to the research problem and subquestions. Another requirement was that the categories gather and embrace statements of all informants, in spite of their heterogeneity. For these purposes, I arrived at four very general main categories: *the child, the teacher, the mother,* and *the school*.

The first three categories include the answers to the first subquestion; *Who are the contributors to the decision and how do they affect the process?* They were identified and named as a result of the analysis of my empirical data, representing the answer to the first part of the question: the key contributors are *the child, the teacher*, and *the mother* – as they are perceived and interpreted by the informants, that is, the mothers themselves. Which role each plays in the decision process is explored and described in various subcategories. The fourth category, *the school*, sheds light on the second subquestion of the research problem; *Which key criteria do mothers emphasize in their evaluation of the different school types and how?*

Knowing what mothers consider as important criteria for a school gives an idea of what might be important to address on the way towards inclusion.

Overlapping among the different categories occurs since the child, the teachers, and the mother interact in the decision process. Furthermore, they all reveal the perception of the mother. For example, how the mother perceives the teachers' interaction with her child or with herself cannot always be distinguished clearly. Furthermore, one might find similarities in the categories *the teacher* and *the school* since teachers are part of a school. Reasons for a subdivision in this way are given along with the presentation of the findings.

In sum, the research problem *How is the decision for regular or special school at the secondary level made for children with special socio-emotional needs?* is to be answered from the point of view of the mothers in the following categories. A frequent use of quotations is in agreement with the goal of a qualitative study to reveal the emic perspectives of the informants (see 3.1), in this case the voices of the mothers.[13]

As the experiences of the informants vary greatly beyond the three groups created in chapter 4.1.2, I decided against a subdivision of the findings in this way, and in favor of a thematic presentation. However, each category is summarized shortly before moving on to the next in order to keep the focus on the research questions. Additionally, an orientation aid for the reader is now provided in terms of letters added to the numbering of the informants. The letter "**r**" stands for the first group including mothers 1 and 2 with their children in **r**egular schools; the letters "**rs**" stand for the second group of mothers whose children have changed or are going to change from **r**egular to **s**pecial school; and the letter "**s**" stands for group 3, representing mothers 6 and 7 with their sons in **s**pecial schools since the 5th grade. This classification results in the following designations: mother/son 1r; mother/son 2r; mother/son 3rs; mother/son 4rs; mother/son 5rs; mother/son 6s; and mother/son 7s.

[13] All quotations provided in this assignment were edited to fit into the study. After being transformed from oral to written statements by transcribing the interviews, they were translated from German to English, which I did to the best of my abilities. Moreover, the oral language was slightly adapted to written style by omitting filling words and pauses. These changes can result in a decrease of the study's validity.

4.2.1 The child

This category, divided into *Kind and degree of problems* and *School achievement*, sheds light on challenges faced by the children as they are perceived by their mothers. It builds on their experiences as well as on feedback received by teachers and other professionals.

Kind and degree of problems

One of the sampling criteria was that the child had officially documented behavior problems. Mothers 4rs, 5rs and 6s described the problems of their sons as grave. Mother 4rs thinks that her son plays on his diagnosis ADHD, and that not all of his behavior can be ascribed to this. She faces great difficulties with her son, including in everyday life where he *"vehemently rebels against all instructions"*. Son 6s has been assumed to have ADHD by his mother since birth because his elder brother and mother have had similar problems: *"When it comes to [son 6s], we knew it beforehand that… we anticipated that he might develop the same problems […]"* Mother 5rs's description of her son's stays in the hospital because of obsessive-compulsive behavior shed light on the severity of her son's problems that she experiences at home as well as what the teachers and classmates experience at school.

However, the perception of the mothers did not in all cases agree with what the documents describe. Mother 1r, for instance, added when talking about the learning difficulties of her son: *"Then this ADHD. Although he doesn't have ADHD, in my opinion."* Later, she admitted: *"From time to time, he displays some problem behavior, yes. With his aggressiveness sometimes."* Mother 2r is very aware of the needs of her son. His compulsory behavior has been severe at certain points in time, but:

> *"He didn't need any educational support. It was about embedding him somehow in a surrounding where his idiosyncrasies and the school were compatible."*

Mother 7s described her son as a *"little dreamer"* who had difficulties to catch up with his classmates at primary school. In spite of teachers' assumptions that he might have ADHD, this was never diagnosed. His mother experienced him as *"just normal"* except for the fact that he was *"jittery*" at that time.

Due to the fact that she has few problems with her son, mother 3rs placed the main responsibility for conflicts at school on the teachers: *"In school, I think, there are such conflicts and such difficulties because the teachers don't notice…, just start shouting and*

screaming, and [son 3rs] doesn't like that at all." He reacts very sensitively to teacher's harsh tones in the class. Apart from that, her descriptions focused mainly on the depression her son has had after the break-up between his mother and her partner. Furthermore, he has problems concentrating because of ADD. She continued, *"He is a special child. A special case, not like the others."* At the same time, she emphasized that he is *"not disabled"*. It is interesting to note that none of the informants used words like *"disability"* when speaking of their sons. Instead, they spoke of diseases, idiosyncrasies, or problems.

School achievement

School achievement plays a crucial role in the decision for type of school at secondary level in the selective school systems of Germany (see 1.3.1).

The intelligence of son 2r was assessed to be high. Special school was never considered, and a lower regular school was expected to demand too little from him. On the other hand, the pressure to perform at a higher regular school would cause blockades, so the comprehensive school with its adaptability was considered the best solution.

In the case of son 4rs, the mother described her son's grades as average, but his intelligence as high enough to reach a middle school degree. *"At a special school, you can only obtain a lower degree, and to be honest, I consider him too good for that."* Due to this, she expects him to go back to his regular school after attending a special class for one year.

The school achievement of the other informants' sons was lower than average in primary school. Most of them have repeated one or more grades due to non-sufficient achievement. Sons 5rs, 6s and 7s are all enrolled in the special school, but follow the regular school's curriculum. The fact that low school achievement enhances consideration of special school is expressed by mother 5rs. After the hospital stays of her son, he had big difficulties at school. He repeated one school year, and his mother was wondering what to do for a long time.

> *"Then there was a week, where he suddenly had good grades again, and we thought, 'Oh, special school is not necessary anyway, thanks God, he can continue here after all.'"* (Mother 5rs)

Mother 6s, in contrast, described the decision for special school as prevention:

"Grades, no, they were not so bad actually. It was more about… that they didn't get worse. That the achievement level remained the same. If he really had changed to the normal regular school, as I said, the big classes, no one cares... They would have decreased."

Mother 1r's son has officially documented learning difficulties. She noticed his lack of interest for school already in the first grade. From the 3rd grade on, he received special support at school, and special school was suggested early. However, his mother decided to send him to regular school, where he attends a regular class, but is taught and assessed according to the curriculum of the special school.

Low school achievement, in combination with behavior problems, seems to limit the choice between different schools because it leads to fewer options. Guest schools would usually refuse the application of a child who is likely to cause problems, so that the remaining options usually are the school of the catchment area and the special school. Mother 3rs said about the decision for the regular school:

> *Mother 3rs: I couldn't do anything else, because there was no other school for him to attend.*
>
> *Me: Why not?*
>
> *Mother 3rs: Because of his school certificates. And plus, this was the only regular school that offered special support.*

Mother 4rs's son attended a guest school before changing to special school. His acceptance was based on a trial period and withdrawn by the first part of the fifth school year. His grades had decreased so much by then that he would probably have had to repeat the school year. She didn't see any other option but the special school then:

"What should I have told the principal of another school? – 'Yes, I am sorry, my son is expelled from his school… Would you like to accept a problem child?' Then they would have told me – 'Why should we do that?'"

Summary 4.2.1

In the preceding subchapter, I explored the role of the child in the decision for a certain type of school at the secondary level. Being under-aged, the son is represented by his mother or parents in the school decision. In relation to the first subquestion in the research problem (see

1.1), I regard the son as one important (passive) contributor to the school decision in the way that his abilities or difficulties are considered in it.

It was shown that most mothers with a son in special school experienced his behavior problems as serious, in contrast to the mothers who decided for regular schooling. Although they were aware of his difficulties, they did not see the necessity of a special school. However, this was not the case for all informants. Son 7s attended special school and son 3rs was about to change to special school at the time of the interview, although their mothers did not describe great challenges. Low school achievement influenced the decision for special school in all cases but one (mother 4rs), but did not prevent son 1r from attending regular school. Son 2r's high intelligence certainly helped the fact that his parents never considered special school.

4.2.2 The teacher

As determined by law, teachers play a crucial role in the process of choosing secondary school for children. Their role is to support and council parents in the school decision (TMBWK, 2010), which makes them another key contributor to it. This category is divided into two subcategories: the teachers' *Interaction with the child* and their *Interaction with the mother*. I came to the conclusion that they represent the teacher's role in the mother's experience and school decision in the best way. When discussing the teacher's role here, I refer to different kinds of teachers from schooling prior to the present school, that is, mainly from primary school. In the cases of mothers 3rs, 4rs, and 5rs, I also refer to former secondary school teachers who were involved in the later decision for special school. In most cases, more than one teacher was involved in the school decision, for example class teachers and special educators. School principals in some cases also took part in the counseling of the parents.[14]

[14] For the Norwegian reader, it might be interesting to know that there is no equivalent to the Norwegian Educational-psychological service (*PP-tjenesten*) in Germany. However, there are special counselors for Joint Education and also for the different kinds of special needs in Thuringia.

Interaction with the child

The term "interaction with the child" is in this subchapter used as an umbrella term including the teachers' knowledge about and responsiveness to the children's needs as perceived by their mothers.

The experiences here varied greatly. Some mothers said that their children's needs were met sufficiently and that the relation to the teachers was good. Others reported a lack of understanding on the part of the teachers.

To show the range of experiences, I first contrast the statements of mother 2r and mother 4rs. Mother 2r told about the immediate reaction of primary school teachers when her son's compulsive behavior suddenly started to increase. For example, he refused to cut out something in paper or to start writing on a new page. As these activities are mostly school-related, the mother's attention was not drawn to her son's change before being informed by the school. The class teacher was educated in the field of special needs and in the teaching methods by Maria Montessori. She approached son 2r's challenges in this way:

> *"How can we make it possible for him that he… with his compulsions, still manages everyday school life or that he gets through it reasonably well."*

While the process of developing an individual education plan was ongoing, small adaptations were made for him to make things easier. For instance, the numbering of questions in exams was omitted for all pupils. In this way, it was easier for son 2r to answer the questions in an order according to whether he knew the answer. Or the teachers simply accepted when son 2r came late in the morning because it was difficult for him to get started. Mother 2r is satisfied with the teacher's efforts: *"They have done very, very much."* The attitude she was met with was that her son belonged to the class just like any other pupil.

Son 4rs, in contrast, met little understanding. Although he was diagnosed with ADHD in the 3rd grade, mother 4rs complained that no adaptations were made for him. *"There was no response at all to this… that he had ADHD."* Flexibility was not offered on the part of the teachers in terms of grading or homework. For example, his dyslexia and concentration difficulties were not taken into consideration in dictations. As a result, he received bad grades in spite of his efforts. An individual education plan was only written after the mother had received the expulsion from the secondary school in order to pave the way into special school.

At the same time, special support started to be provided. Prior to that, son 4rs was not considered a special needs pupil because of his average school achievement.

Due to their learning difficulties, the other five children in the study received support by a special educator from primary school on. However, this support was mostly limited to a couple of hours a week. In terms of mother 7s, it was the teachers who drew her attention to the weaknesses of her son from the first school year on and who arranged for him to get special support. The opposite was the case for mother 1r, where teachers did not react to the son's problems until the mother took initiative.

> *"The primary school did not do anything, at first. They told me that he had an individual education plan, but in fact, I never saw it."* (Mother 1r)

However, when the local school authority was involved, a teacher from the Mobile Services for Special Needs Education took care of her son and adaptations were made. For example, grading was paused from the second half of the 3rd grade to the end of the 4th grade.

All mothers emphasized the crucial impact of a good teacher-pupil relation for the well-being of the child and also for the school decision. This relation is not the least influenced by the teachers' knowledge and attitudes. Mother 4rs, who has faced rather difficult situations with teachers, thinks that *"many teachers have this prejudice that ADHD-children are ghetto-children"*. According to her experience, teachers do not know anything about ADHD and still do not learn about it as part of their education. She further thinks that chemistry between teacher and pupil plays a role:

> *"It's all about that they happen to have exactly the right teacher, where the chemistry between them is good. So I think if [son 4rs] hadn't had this class teacher in the regular school, but maybe another one, it would maybe not have been necessary for him to go to special school."*

Two of the mothers described bullying situations on the part of the teacher (mothers 1r and 5rs). Two others described their sons' feelings of being "unwanted" when they got to know that they were expelled by their school (mothers 3rs and 4rs). Mother 6s emphasized that she has been *"lucky"* with teachers because they made an effort with her son and took care of him. Mother 3rs said that the relationship between her son and his class teacher at the regular school is good. However, *"it is not enough"* to make the school cope with his problem

behavior when there are conflicts with all other teachers. She misses the teachers' ability to respond to her son's behavior and change their way of speaking with him:

"The teachers nowadays, they don't notice… just start shouting and screaming and [son 3rs] doesn't like that at all." […] How can it be that so many grown-ups are unable to deal with one child?"

Although she assumed that teachers are over-challenged with the behavior of her child, she did not express understanding. The problematic relationship she has with the school herself (see next subcategory) explains this lack of understanding. The other mothers, however, showed understanding concerning the teachers' limited capability of taking care of their children with special needs:

"It was also their helplessness, you know. They don't have the capacities to take care of one child that intensely." (Mother 2r)

"Well, I think that she's done her best. She was a nice and calm person, but I think, with 16 boys and five girls in a class… you're quite over-challenged. So, I understand her situation, there were three or four other ADHD-children in the class, too […]." (Mother 4rs)

"How should it go? In the beginning, they tried to make an effort, and they really did! They tried everything to help him. But then, after a while, I noticed that their energy vanished, that they didn't know what to do anymore… and when they get nothing in return by the pupil himself… […]. At one point, it simply didn't work out anymore." (Mother 5rs)

Interaction with the mother

This subcategory deals with how mothers perceived cooperation with teachers and their support in the decision for type of school at secondary level.

The informants who evaluated the cooperation with teachers before the school decision as constantly positive, are mothers 2r, 5rs and 6s. They represent thus all three groups I divided the informants into (see 4.1.2); a fact which indicates great variation in this subcategory as well. These mothers had frequent contact with their sons' teachers and described them as helpful, both in developing an individual education plan and in the process of transition. Mother 5rs was recommended sending her son to special school after preschool examinations. However, this recommendation was not acted upon until many years later. She spoke about the special educator's support in this decision: *"And she really put an effort into it so that it was immediately arranged and approved by the local school authorities."* For mother 6s, who

has been in contact with doctors, psychologists and other professionals since her son was an infant, the teacher's recommendation for special school did not come unexpectedly either. By coincidence, her son's primary school class was very small which she described as an advantage because the teacher had time for each child. This argument will be revisited in the fourth category (see 4.2.4).

Mother 2r, initially, felt she had to defend her son: *"In the beginning, it's always… that the child is brought up badly, you know."* However, her experiences were positive overall. Being educated within special needs, her son's class teacher used her knowledge to provide support. She informed mother 2r about an *expert advisor for pupils with autistic behavior*[15] and initiated contact with her. This external advisor came to observe son 2r in teaching settings and developed the individual education plan. It was also the advisor's recommendation to apply to the comprehensive school.

Serious lack of information and knowledge on the part of the teachers were experienced by mothers 1r and 4rs:

> *"In primary school, I was told that special support in regular schools is only provided for children with a minority background."* (Mother 1r)

> *"Well, in the 4th grade, I didn't even know that children with ADHD can attend special schools."* (Mother 4rs)

Mother 4rs further described that she originally wanted her son to attend a regular comprehensive school. She had asked the teachers in primary school about deadlines for application, but missed these due to wrong information.

Mother 1r clearly opposed the recommendation given by the teachers and sent her son to a regular school. She is the only mother in the group of informants whose opposing decision had a long-lasting effect. Special school was suggested early to both mothers 3rs and 5rs as another option beside regular school, which they refused. However, both had to give in after a certain period of time.

Mother 7s had regular contact with her son's primary school teachers, as the family lives in a village outside the city and the school is next door. She often spoke to the teachers when picking up her son from school, but described conflicts of a more personal than professional

[15] Translated from German: "Landesfachberaterin für Schüler mit autistischem Verhalten".

nature in the interview: *"You know how it is in a village, everybody knows everybody, and some don't have a good opinion about others."* She had a hard time accepting the teachers' recommendation to send her son to special school, but did not hesitate long: *"Why should I think more about it?"* This is how she explained her negative feelings towards the teachers: *"Perhaps because they said the truth and I was unable to cope with it?"*

Mother 3rs, at the time of the interview, has given in to the pressure by the teachers of her son's regular secondary school and applied to special school. The duty to meet at school several times every week placed on her by the principal was hard for her to fulfill because of her work situation and led to resignation in the end. Due to the lack of understanding the teachers and principal of the school showed for her situation, she is *"very disappointed with the school"*. The advice of the principal to quit her work in order to care for her child especially upset her:

> *"For them it's easy, why don't they stay at home? For them it's easier, they have a good job, five times vacation a year and good money. For them it's easy to say that. Try to put yourself in my shoes and then we'll see if you manage."* (Mother 3rs)

Furthermore, mother 3rs expressed what she expects from the teachers when it comes to counseling parents in the decision for type of secondary education: *"If even the teachers don't know, whom should I ask then? […] I trusted them. I thought the teachers should know more than me."*

An external factor, that in some cases complicated the cooperation between teachers and mothers, was changes in the teaching staff. Two mothers (2r and 4rs) mentioned problems related to these changes, whereas few difficulties were perceived by mothers 3rs and 6s. In the case of son 2r, the dislocation by one of his class teachers triggered his compulsive behavior. Mother 4rs reported so many changes in the teaching staff at primary school that *"even more contact wouldn't have helped [the communication], particularly because stability is exactly what these children need"*.

Summary 4.2.2

The teacher's influence on the school decision was elaborated upon in this category in order to find answers to the research problem's first subquestion (see 1.1). In addition to the child itself, teachers are a second group of key contributors to the decision, but unlike the children,

they affect it actively. This is determined by law and has also been found in the empirical data. However, the data reveal that their role exceeds the function of being a counselor for the parents – also the interaction between the child and the teacher can influence the decision.

The experiences varied strongly across the three groups of mothers in this category. Some mothers were happy with the way their sons' needs were addressed in former schools, and others described problematic relationships, both between the son and the teacher/s and between the mother and the teacher/s. Mothers 3rs and 4rs, both with negative experiences from the regular secondary school, emphasized the decision's dependency on the teachers, because their interaction with the child determined the child's behavior and functioning in the class. Mothers 5rs and 6s, however, experienced the teachers as great support, although it did not prevent their sons from attending a special school. Also in the first group of mothers (1r and 2r), diverging patterns were described. While mother 1r did not feel supported well, mother 2r had good contact with the teachers and was satisfied with their efforts.

Lack of knowledge, negative attitudes towards the sons' special needs, or insufficient counseling on the part of the teacher were reported by mothers across all three groups. Mother 2r is the only informant who was referred to an expert advisor. Most mothers (all but mother 3rs) also expressed understanding for the teachers' difficulties to deal with their sons' problems in addition to all other children's needs in a classroom.

The third group of mothers (mothers 6s and 7s) followed the teachers' school recommendations without much hesitation, while the second group (mothers 3rs-5rs) described the special school as the last option, encouraged by increasing pressure on the part of the teachers. The first group was divided. Mother 2r agreed with the teachers' advice. Only mother 1r opposed the advice strongly and with a lasting effect.

4.2.3 The mother

According to the school law, parents have the right of choice when it comes to secondary schooling for their child (TMBWK, 2010). They are thus the third key contributor to the decision as asked for in the research problem. In place of both parents, mothers portray how they experienced this process in this thesis. The category is divided into three subcategories: *personal support system, involvement & self-determination,* and *attitude towards schools.*

Personal support system

"It's not possible alone – only within the system." (Mother 2r)

Due to the findings I am going to show within this subcategory, I assume that the mother's embedding in a support system is advantageous for the decision for a regular secondary school. The heading 'personal support system' here focuses on the mothers' primary network (see 2.1). Beside the families, it further encompasses friends and acquaintances. Even though the secondary network also can be perceived as part of the support system, professionals like psychologists are given less attention in this chapter because their advice was mainly limited to diagnoses, not school decisions. Teachers are not considered in depth here as this was done elsewhere (see 4.2.2).

Mothers 3rs, 4rs and 6s are single mothers. Son and mother 3rs have no contact with the father, whereas mothers 4rs and 6s described rather complicated relationships between themselves and the fathers of their sons. The contact between the sons and their fathers is in both cases negatively influenced by the father's new partner and little or no support is provided, either financially or in terms of decision-making. Both mothers 3rs and 4rs described that the problems of their sons have influenced their own failure to find a new partner. Mother 3rs: *"I didn't look for a new husband because I concentrated too much on my son. He is everything to me."* Mother 4rs thinks that she has not found a new partner in ten years because of her son's behavior: *"I wouldn't do that to myself either if I had the choice."* Mother 3rs, who had come to Germany ten years ago without her family, especially feels that she *"has nobody*" to support her. Since she spends so much time at work, her mother had been in Germany for a few months when the interview was conducted in order to help her daughter dealing with son 3rs. When it comes to additional support, mother 3rs would have wished for more information: "*They [the teachers] didn't recommend anything and I didn't know what other therapies exist."* This statement would also fit into the previous category (see 4.2.2, *interaction with the mother*) but is used here in order to underline mother 3rs's lack of support.

Mother 4rs seems to have a good network of friends, and mother 6s named her ex-mother-in-law as the only person supporting her with the children. The latter is the only one of the informants who had sought support at a social-pediatric center and an advice center for

families, both of which were recommended by her son's teachers. All seven mothers had been in contact with psychologists, which some experienced as very helpful, while some did not.

Mothers 1r, 2r, 5rs and 7s are married and live together with their husbands. Mother 2r described her and her husband's role in the upbringing of their children as equal. Mother 1r mentioned her husband frequently when talking about the school decision and also referred to other family members nearby that she has good contact with. How the process from the initial occurrence of her son's compulsions to the time when the interview was conducted was for her husband, was described by mother 5rs:

"Initially, my husband had great troubles accepting what [son 5rs] had. For him, it was nothing but foolery in the start. By now, he has learned to deal with it, and things work out quite well with us. We are very well-practiced now and are both standing on the same level."

Two mothers told that they have been supported by a friend in the process of school decision. A friend of mother 2r's is a teacher at the Rudolf Steiner School that was taken into consideration when looking for secondary school. She had frequent conversations with her and got advice. If it hadn't been for the long distance, son 2r would be enrolled in that school today. Mother 1r made contact with an acquaintance of hers working in the school authorities when the school decision was approaching. It was this contact that provided her with the knowledge she needed to stand up against teachers' recommendations and fight for the ongoing enrolment in regular education of her son (see next subcategory).

These two mothers further reported that experiences with elder siblings and their teachers have been helpful in the decision process. Mother 1r has had good experiences with her elder son's regular guest school. She got advice from one of his teachers which made access to the school easier for son 1r in spite of his special needs. Mother 6s and 7s, in contrast, learned from the negative experiences with their other children's regular secondary schools, and drew their conclusions in favor of the special school. Mother 7s spoke of difficulties with the teachers there whereas mother 6s referred to the *"social behavior of such a big school where everybody only cares about themselves"*.

Involvement & self-determination

This subcategory represents to some extent the counterpart of the previous one. In addition to the benefit of being embedded in a functioning personal support system, the mother's own

involvement plays a decisive role for both development and schooling of a child with special socio-emotional needs:

The special needs of the children in the study were by most mothers described as demanding a lot from them. Mother 5rs said: "*He is our only child, and it was clear to me very fast that we will not have more, because…it cost me a lot of energy in all these years. […]"* Mother 6s wondered, *"Maybe he is the reason why I don't have a full-time job?"*, and mother 4rs spoke about a *"battle"* that she fights with her son every day. All mothers have in common that they reported increased worries and an expected higher level of involvement in the child's schooling. Since this is exactly what is difficult for mother 3rs to accomplish due to her work situation, she receives a lot of criticism from the teachers. The following statement illustrates a red thread through the interviews, especially for the mothers whose children attend or attended regular secondary school:

> *"Children fall through the cracks if there is no one standing behind them [e.g. the mother]."* (Mother 2r)

The highest amount of self-initiative when it comes to gathering information about available types of schools was described by mother 2r. She and her husband ended up with several schools to choose from, including which also a non-public school, a Rudolf Steiner school. None of the other informants mentioned a non-public school as a possible option. Also, mothers 1r and 4rs, whose children both attended guest schools at first, put an effort into looking for other options because of a negative reputation of the schools in their catchment area. Both also felt that they had to put pressure on the schools for responding to their children's needs by contacting the school authorities.

> *"Then I called in the Mobile Services and the local authorities. I was accurately prepared when I spoke with the primary school teacher, and she was surprised when I rolled out my artillery about all that is due to me as a mother, or to my child, from the school."* (Mother 1r)

Mother 5rs felt supported by teachers all the way long. However, she put a lot of effort into her son's schooling, and spent, for example, many hours every day with him doing homework and preparing for tests: *"I had to acquire everything for him by my own initiative."* Furthermore, she is the only one among the seven mothers who applied for an "integration

assistant"[16] as another attempt to enable him to stay in the regular class. Her experiences were purely negative: it took the responsible youth welfare office several months to respond negatively to the application. The reason: *"This is way too expensive and the youth welfare office cannot afford it."*

Self-determination in the decision itself was generally perceived higher by the mothers who, regardless of persistence, decided in favor of a regular secondary school after primary school. Mother 1r literally contended for her son's enrolment in regular school:

"For me, it was clear that my son will go to regular school, I never considered special school. When the teachers recommended sending him to special school, I said: 'no! He attends the regular school and you'll give him special support!'"(Mother 1r)

Little self-determination was left when things went wrong in the regular school, in contrast, as exemplified by mother 4rs' words:

"The teacher called me, she was very upset. She told me that such behavior was unbearable and that they were unwilling to teach him any longer. And since I know that it is a guest school, they are not obliged to teach him either. [...] *What should I have done? I didn't have any options."*(Mother 4rs)

The mothers in the third group (6s and 7s) perceived their own influence on the decision differently. Yet none of them talked about own initiatives to find other schooling options, including mother 3rs.

Attitudes towards school types

As elaborated above in the subcategory *involvement & self-determination*, a bad reputation of a regular school in the catchment area influenced the school decision for two children. Here, I am going to focus more on the attitudes mothers had related to different school types, such as special school, lower regular school and comprehensive school.

Attitudes concerning the different school types that the mothers had prior to the decision were mentioned frequently. All mothers, except for the one that has not been faced with it (mother 2r), expressed bad initial assumptions related to special school. Prejudices and fear of stigmatization were common, but reported to different extents. In mother 4rs's case, I

[16] Direct translation from the German word "Integrationshelfer". This term refers to an often uneducated person that assists a pupil with special needs in regular schooling in order to forward inclusion.

interpret her reaction to my question whether she had considered special school earlier as related to negative feelings. She answered "no" very quickly and her body language expressed discomfort. Later in the interview, she indicated that the idea of special school seemed alright to her, but only because of its limited duration. Mother 6s mentioned only shortly a negative connotation to the word "special school", and mother 1r had troubles putting her thoughts into words. *"I just didn't want!"* is what she repeated several times when being asked about her reasons to oppose the teachers' recommendation to send her son to special school. However, she is convinced that children at special school will be facing many difficulties later in life:

"If they get a degree after ten school years at special school, it will never be acknowledged in the same way as a normal degree, that's for sure […]".

The remaining three mothers made their initial negative attitudes very explicit. Mothers 5rs and 7s explained the connotations they related to the former terms for special school, when there was no selective system in the former German Democratic Republic. Special schools only existed for pupils with severe mental or physical disorders then, so the suggestion of sending their sons to such a school was a shock to them. Mother 3rs was not familiar with separating pupils either, as it was not practiced in her home county. She perceives it as a lack of effort on the part of the teachers if a child is excluded from a regular school. In addition, she is afraid of her son being labeled "disabled" (see 4.2.1).

These negative attitudes in most cases did not prevent the child from being enrolled in a special school after all, although it made the decision process more difficult and long-lasting in the cases of mothers 3rs, 4rs, and 5rs. Teachers' counseling about the advantages of special schools (see 4.2.4) seemed to have had a greater influence than their own attitudes in the end.

A strong belief in the benefits of regular education was expressed by mothers 1r, 2r and 3rs, whose sons were all enrolled in regular schools when the interviews were conducted.

Mother 1r is interested in *"not excluding the weaker children. The weaker ones always face more difficulties in life, always! Like this, he [son 1r] can say that he attends a normal school and doesn't have to tell anybody that he gets special support. That's none of their business."*

Mother 3rs thinks that a heterogeneous group of pupils is a benefit because the children would feel *"normal"* and can help each other, which is not the case in a special school: *"If you are together with fools, you'll turn into a fool yourself."*

Son 2r is enrolled in a school that maybe comes closest to inclusion in its original understanding (see 1.4.1; 2.3.3) in spite of its selection procedures when taking in new pupils, because it is open for students with different kinds of abilities and disabilities. This decision was made very conscientiously by his mother:

"I am anyway an advocate of comprehensive schools. It's better when they learn together. The final examination after the 10th grade is an advantage because the way is open after that. Also it is better for the social development. […] *Further, I think that not all parents know after the 4th grade how their child will develop."*

This statement could also have been placed in the next category (see 4.2.4). However, mother 2r mentioned this explicitly as her initial attitude, not as a school evaluation in the aftermath. For her, inclusion is natural and only limited by resources. Referring to children with severe disabilities, she said: *"I think they shouldn't be separated from other pupils because they belong to us. Or we belong to them."*

Summary 4.2.3

In this category, the mothers' contribution to the school decision was elaborated in three subcategories. With regard to the first subquestion of the research problem, the mother is a key contributor to the decision herself. This was shown by the data and is also in accordance with the law, which says that mothers (or parents) are the final decision makers when it comes to secondary schooling. However, not all mothers experienced that the decision was theirs to make – this refers mainly to those informants whose child attends or is going to attend special school (mothers 3rs, 4rs, & 7s). On the other hand, a high level of involvement was described mainly by mothers who either have or had their children in regular schools (mothers 1r, 2r, 4rs, and 5rs). Mother 1r is the clearest example for the necessity of parents' involvement in the decision for regular school.

A good personal support system seemed to be helpful for a decision in favor of a regular school. Both mothers in the first group (1r and 2r) described well-functioning relationships in the family. It is also these mothers who had external contacts that provided support in the decision. In the case of mother 5rs, good support did not prevent her son from changing to special school in the end because of his extremely difficult challenges.

Finally, personal attitudes towards school types were considered, but did not affect the final decision much. In fact, most mothers' initial prejudices against special school faded through the teachers' advices.

4.2.4 The school

This category is meant to serve as an evaluation of the different school types in terms of key criteria identified by the mothers' narratives. It aims at providing answers to the second subquestion of the research problem (see 1.1). The findings presented under this category differ from those in the category *the teacher* (see 4.2.2) as they relate to the teachers at the actual school at the secondary level only. Furthermore, the teachers are only one aspect among others here.

As a general tendency, I want to point out that the seven mothers in this study expressed contentment with the actual school of their children, independent of school type. Mother 2r said in this regard: *"Parents have to accept the school the way it is. And vice versa."* Since her son is already in the 9th grade, I asked mother 7s which type of school she would choose today, being more aware of the possibilities for regular schooling than five years ago. She is convinced: *"I would choose special school again."* Taking into consideration son 3rs's imminent change to special school, it is not surprising that mother 3rs is an exception to this tendency within the sample.

The four subcategories *class size, teacher competence and care, belonging,* and *future perspectives* represent criteria that mothers emphasized in their school evaluation and were chosen by their noticeable recurrence in a majority of the interviews, yet not all of them were addressed by all mothers. Other occurring criteria were left out because less emphasis was placed on them by the majority of the mothers.

Class size

According to mothers 3rs-7s, the smaller classes are the main advantage of special school since this allows teachers to look after the individual pupil more intensely and to explain things repeatedly. For most of them, this is the crucial factor: *"Thanks to that, he now receives good grades from time to time, which gives him back some of the motivation to go to school."* (Mother 5rs)

The relevance of class size is emphasized by the following to quotations:

"The only difference [between regular and special school] is that there are fewer children in the class, so they can look more after the children." (Mother 3rs)

"For us, the best alternative would have been another small… a ten-pupil-class with normal children and maybe two children with ADHD." (Mother 4rs)

It is interesting to note that only mothers 1r and 2r, whose sons' attendance of regular school is unthreatened, did not mention this topic at all. They did not express that they believe that the bigger classes are a disadvantage either.

Teacher competence and care

Mothers 4rs-7s perceived teachers' special education as well as their higher ability to show care and respect in a special school as a benefit both for the interaction with the child and with the parents. Mothers 5rs, 6s and 7s emphasized the good relations between the teachers and their sons. Mother 4rs described that her concerns are taken more seriously by the teachers of the special school and mother 5rs feels more supported by the teachers at the special school.

Good relations with the teachers, however, were also described by mothers 1r and 2r. Although none of them perceived the teachers of the regular schools as being very competent or skillful in terms of their sons' needs, they appreciate their availability, openness and willingness to understand.

All mothers, except mother 3rs, talked about a well-functioning cooperation with the teachers:

"The class teachers are always approachable; everybody has their phone number and can call them any time, in the evening or even in the weekend. And they do attend to the matters that you're bringing up." (Mother 2r)

"If there is something wrong, they call or write into his notebook, or after a parent-teacher conference, they say, 'Please stay a little longer, let's talk about it.' That's alright." (Mother 7s)

Belonging

According to mother 2r's words (*"They belong to us. Or we belong to them."*), I chose to call this subcategory *belonging*. It incorporates both how the mothers experience the social environment in the school and their perceptions in terms of inclusion.

First, the social environment at the special school is perceived as rather problematic by mothers 4rs, 5rs and 6s. An increased propensity to violence causes concerns and has led to difficult situations in all three cases. Both son 5rs and 6s have been bullied at times. On the other hand, mother 4rs guessed that it will be easier for her son to find friends in his special class, because the pupils might understand each others' idiosyncrasies better. Mother 5rs reported how her son has been labeled as a "fool", not only by his classmates in the regular school, but by the youth in their village in general. Her greatest wish for him is to be accepted for the person he is and this is why she has learned to appreciate the special school:

"And there, at the special schools, the children are at least equal, somehow. He has a problem, he has a disease, and that's exactly why he attends this school, right? And there he is allowed to. When he's here, where everything is normal, he is not." (Mother 5rs)

What mothers 5rs and 6s described is what I want to refer to as inward inclusion within the school. Outward inclusion within the society has obviously become a lower priority for these mothers, taking into account the well-being of their child.

When being asked about possible advantages of regular school, mother 5rs answered:

"Well, they would belong, just like the other children. To the outside, I'd say. That's what it looks like, to the outside. […] But the children's thoughts remain, right?"

As quoted earlier, inclusion within the society is very important to mother 1r. Her son is quite well accepted by his classmates at the regular school, too. This is the case for son 2r as well, whose problem behavior has decreased a lot since he started at the comprehensive school. Even though his mother also described negative issues regarding the social environment of his class, this had nothing to do with him particularly.

Future perspectives

Among the mothers whose children attend special school, only mother 4rs thinks that the special school would create barriers for her son if it was persistent, because only a low school degree can be achieved. The other mothers (5rs-7s) actually reported the opposite – that the special school supports their sons in such a way that they are more likely to obtain a school degree, something they would likely not do if they had remained in regular school. Mother 5rs especially talked about a changed focus from high future expectations to a basic hope that her son will get a low school degree and find an appropriate job that he can be acknowledged for.

In addition, she positively emphasized the special school's focus on supporting the pupils in their career choice. Unlike what mother 1r is convinced of, these three mothers did not express any concern about a minor acceptance of the degree obtained at a special school.

The mothers' future expectations are generally modest and realistic. The only son that really aims at achieving a higher school degree is son 2r. Thanks to choosing the comprehensive school, he has good chances at reaching this aim. Yet he probably would have been expelled from a higher secondary school by now, his mother assumed, because of the larger pressure to perform.

Summary 4.2.4

In this category, four criteria for evaluation of the different school types were investigated in order to provide answers to the second subquestion in the research problem (see 1.1). These aspects are important to take into consideration when exploring how the decision for a certain type of school is made (see main research problem), because they reflect one of the key contributors' concerns. For example, by looking at mothers' positive experiences with special school, one can better understand why they (in the case of most informants here) did not try to revise the decision.

Smaller *class sizes* as well as better *teacher competence and care* were two criteria positively emphasized by mothers of children in special school. The lower number of children in the classroom was expressed as the main difference between special and regular school several times. However, these factors were not mentioned negatively by the two other mothers either.

Belonging within the classroom and the sheltered special school was more important to the mothers of the second and third group (mothers 3rs-7s) because most of them have had the experience that their sons were outsiders among other children. The mothers in the first group (1r and 2r) focused more strongly on the natural belonging with other pupils and with the society in general. When it comes to *future perspectives*, most mothers with their child in special school expected these to be better due to likely failure in regular school. However, the opposite was assumed by mother 1r with her child in regular school and mother 4rs, who hopes for her son's return to regular school after one year. They emphasized that the future perspectives are better at a regular school.

5 Discussion and concluding remarks

This final chapter consists of two main parts, which include several subchapters each. The first part is a discussion of the findings (5.1), whereas the second part provides concluding remarks (5.2).

5.1 Discussion

In this subchapter, the results presented in chapter 4 are discussed in light of the theoretical, political and empirical framework that was provided in chapter 2 of this study. The research questions were the guideline according to which answers were generated from the empirical data. The main research question was: *How is the decision for regular or special school at the secondary level made for children with special socio-emotional needs?* Also in this chapter, it is important to keep in mind that the findings only represent the experiences and perceptions of one group of possible informants. In addition, this group is represented by only seven mothers, which is not a sufficient sample size for generalizing. I will come back to this issue in subchapter 5.2. The emic perspective of the informants that was presented in the previous chapter, is here expanded upon by my own interpretations, also referred to as the researcher's etic perspective (see 3.1).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of human development helped to identify the fact that the decisions were not made by one person, but that it was an interaction of several contributors. It was used as a framework for presenting the data in chapter 4. Bronfenbrenner's concept of an ecological transition has been referred to in chapter 2.1. Klefbeck and Ogden (2003) emphasized the fact that this transition is experienced according to the feelings related to it and not the least to the persons involved in it. The persons involved have already been identified in order to answer the first subquestion of the research problem. Their influence on the decision is discussed further in subchapter 5.1.2. After that, I reflect upon the question about the connection between parental choice and educational injustice (5.1.3). This discussion focuses on the mother as a key contributor to the decision. It aims at evaluating the way her background affects the school decision and thus triggers educational injustice. Finally, I reflect upon possible considerations for a more inclusive future (5.1.4). I begin the discussion by explaining the title I chose for this thesis, *A limited choice,* in subchapter 5.1.1.

5.1.1 A limited choice in terms of alternatives and persistence

Although the parents' right of school choice is determined by law (see 2.4.1), the mothers in this study with their children in special educational settings perceived this right to be limited. Most of these mothers found that there were few or no other alternatives due to the child's problem behavior, but also because of its low school achievement. A guest school, for instance, is in most cases not willing to accept a pupil with whom they are likely to have problems. Thus, the only remaining schools are the regular school in the catchment area and the special school. If serious problems occurred with the regular school, as it was the case for sons 3rs, 4rs, and 5rs, mothers faced the special school as the last and only option. The fact that there are few realistic options beside special school for children with special needs is reflected by the low rates of pupils enrolled in Joint Education shown by Klemm (2010). Percentages of children with special needs in regular secondary schools around 15 % indicate a persistent low readiness for Joint Education in Germany. Possible reasons are discussed in the next subchapter.

A lack of persistence in the initial school decision became clear during the sampling process of this study. Instead of finding three mothers with a child in special school and three mothers with a child in regular secondary school, I ended up with a sample of seven informants, five of whom having children that either are in special school or about to change to special school. Only two informants talked about their children's steady and unthreatened attendance of regular school. This fact, supported by the mothers' narratives from the interviews, tells us that the choice, even if it is made by parents at one point, is not necessarily the final decision. This is not consistent with Wocken's (2011b) claims for either self-determination or sustainability (see 5.1.2) in terms of the parents' right of school choice.

5.1.2 The decision as an interaction of contributors

This subcategory explicitly aims at discussing the findings related to the first subquestion of the research problem, which was: *Who are the key contributors to the decision and how do they affect the process?*

According to the educational law (TMBWK, 2010), it is the parents who are the key contributors to the decision for secondary school. The role of the teachers is to counsel the parents in the decision process, and the child's level of mastery is the basis on which school

decisions are made (ibid.). The *mesosystem* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as the interaction between microsystems is thus ascribed a key function in this context. The empirical data collected for this study have confirmed that all of these three contributors played crucial roles in the decision for secondary schooling, but also that their roles diverged from what is determined by law.

Did the seven mothers perceive themselves as decision makers when it comes to choosing secondary schooling? The answer is divided. Mothers of children within regular schooling had a strong feeling of self-determination, which is one of the four criteria Wocken (2011b) referred to when explaining the meaning of a real parental right of choice. However, self-determination decreased alarmingly for mothers of children within special educational settings. As I understood from my informants, it was in several cases the teachers that took over the decision and exerted pressure to the mothers, whose contribution to the decision declined subsequently. The data shows that mothers of children in regular school were more critical towards the teachers' advice, had stronger opinions and were more involved in the search for alternatives than the other mothers. However, this was no guarantee for the decision to be persistent, and as stated above, this does not correspond with Wocken's (2011b) concept of a real parental choice. According to my interpretation of the mothers' voices, the reason why the pressure increased on the part of the teachers is their own inability to deal with the special needs of the child in the classroom. Sætersdal et al. (2008) pointed out that the teachers need a considerable amount of knowledge and backup for coping with the challenging everyday school life with one or more children with special socio-emotional needs. The informants, however, reported that the teachers were over-challenged and unable to respond to the child's needs in an appropriate way. As a consequence, they recommended the parents choose special school. Knowledge on the part of the teachers and the information about other options was reported to be quite limited by some of the informants. This finding is not in agreement with Wocken's criterion of extensiveness (2011b) and supports the hypothesis that parents are counseled insufficiently in terms of Joint Education for their child (Thüringer Forschungs- und Arbeitsstelle für den Gemeinsamen Unterricht, 2010). Another hypothesis stated that parents should be prepared to take legal action in order to ensure schooling within regular settings for their child (ibid.). Although none of the informants in this study has taken legal action, I interpret the hypothesis in a way that a high level of involvement on the part of the parents is required. This has also been expressed by the mothers who have or had their children in regular secondary education settings.

When it comes to the role of the child as the third contributor to the decision, the data have shown that the children, though not actively, actually determined the decision for the school to a great extent. According to my interpretation of the mothers' stories, it was the degree of problem behavior in addition to low school achievement that encouraged attendance of special school. Children who displayed severe behavior problems were less likely to remain in regular schooling settings than children whose behavior was perceived as less severe or continuous. This finding certainly refutes the idea of an inclusive school, which is a school for all children regardless their abilities or difficulties (Wocken, 2010; 2011a). The implementation of international policies on human rights referring to the right to education without discrimination (see 2.3.2) is questioned when separating children with behavior problems to special schools. Inclusive education was not prioritized like it was in the Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO, 1994) or in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006) in the case of five mothers in this study. A reason for this might be that the schools can justify the separation of children with severe problem behavior by referring to the Thuringian educational laws (TMBWK, 2003; 2010). The formulation "*if they cannot be supported sufficiently [in the regular school]"* (see 2.3.1) in the special school law (TMBWK, 2003) legitimates arguments like a lack of resources at the regular school and better conditions for support in the special school. Also the study by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2003) came to the conclusion that children with behavior problems are those whose inclusion in regular schooling is most challenging. It seems that there is a great need for teacher education and support in order to make regular schooling for these children more likely.

5.1.3 Parental right of choice and the equality of opportunities

Both Giesinger (2009) and Brighouse (2008) claimed that the existence of a parental right of school choice threatens educational justice and thus the ideal of equal opportunities to an appropriate education for all children. They are supported by various research results, for example by Tillmann (2009), who found out that children whose parents have an academic background are more likely to attend higher secondary school than other children. Bellenberg et al.'s report (2004) showed that few parents oppose the teachers' recommendation for type of secondary school and if they do, they often have a higher social status and want their child to attend a higher school than what the school achievement in primary school suggests. These statements and findings indicate that social status also should be taken into consideration

when answering the research question of how the decision for a certain type of school is made. I therefore want to discuss this topic by means of the information I got from the mothers.

The introductive descriptions of the family situations (see 4.1.2) showed that only one mother (like her husband) among the seven informants had an academic background. For their son, special school was never even considered, whereas all other informants have had at least special school suggested to them. This finding can be related to Bellenberg et al. (2004), who also pointed out that the parents' social status can have an impact on the teachers' recommendations. However, as this is the case for only one informant in this study, it could be a coincidence, and further research in this field would be necessary to provide genuine support for the statements emphasized by Bellenberg et al. (2004). An additional factor to consider is that of social networks, which seemed to be very stable for the two mothers with their sons in regular school. Both of them (mothers 1r and 2r) underlined the good and equal relation to their husbands, which is, according to Klefbeck & Ogden (2003), the most important relationship in a grown-up's life and a crucial support especially in terms of decisions. Three of the children in this study that attended or were going to attend special school lived in single mother households that were burdened with additional problems like unemployment or a challenging work situation. This is also an indication of the influence of the surroundings on a child's development of problem behavior (Befring, 2008).

Mother 1r and her husband have a working class background. The fact that their son attends regular school was clearly due to his mother's (with her husband's support) determination and involvement. In this regard, she disproves the hypothesis that *"[n]on academic parents do not possess the competence to make the right decision for Joint Education"* (Thüringer Forschungs- und Arbeitsstelle für den Gemeinsamen Unterricht, 2010). However, we have also seen that the majority of the five mothers with their children in special school were less active and determined. This was most obvious for the group of mothers whose child attended special school from the 5th grade on (mothers 6s and 7s).

Do these findings thus indicate that the parental right of school choice triggers unequal opportunities? I would rather say that they impose an increased responsibility on the teachers to counsel parents, especially the ones with a non-academic background and little social support, thoroughly and extensively in order to pave the way towards Joint Education and the superordinate aim of inclusion.

5.1.4 Considerations for a more inclusive future

This subchapter provides a discussion of the findings related to the second subquestion of the research problem, *Which key criteria do mothers emphasize in their evaluation of the different school types and how?,* in view of the right to inclusion that Germany again has committed to by ratifying the latest UN Convention (UN, 2006).

In chapter 4, I have shown that the main criteria leading the mothers in the study to a positive evaluation of the school across the different school types were *class size, teacher competence and care, belonging*, and *future perspectives*. The mothers of children in special schools perceived especially class size, but also teacher competence, as positive aspects of the special school. Sometimes, smaller classes were even the only argument for special school. This is an argument that Klemm (2009) would easily invalidate. According to him, it is only a matter of how the resources are used. When there are, for example, several children with special needs in a regular class, a special educator gets to spend more time in the class and can support the teacher. This would also increase the range of teacher competence in a classroom, with the precondition that the teachers cooperate and exchange knowledge. When it comes to the possibility for teachers to take care of the individual pupils that was so often emphasized by the informants, it would be of equal benefit to increase the staff in a class as to decrease the number of pupils. A bigger class can even have advantages because there are more possibilities to build social relationships as far as the criterion of belonging is concerned. It also entails a greater potential for conflicts, of course. However, these are only theoretical thoughts about how the situation could be if Joint Education was practiced in an effective way. The practice still is, at least in the case of the informants in this study, that not all children receive sufficient support in regular schools. It is not surprising that the smaller classes and specialized teacher competence in a special school are more convenient to most of the mothers then.

The matter of belonging, although in different ways, was addressed by all mothers in this study. I therefore suggest that it is a critical factor as far as the well-being of the child is concerned. Problem behavior is usually interconnected with social difficulties, so it is obvious that it is a great challenge to achieve real inclusion in terms of an affirmed heterogeneity where all children belong to a natural entity (Wocken, 2011a) especially for this group of children, as was concluded by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2003). At this early stage of development towards a more inclusive school system,

the mothers in this study expressed a dilemma: Is it the best for a child to have a strong feeling of belonging by being among other children with similar problems, or is it more important to be part of the "normal" society? The question that teachers and schools should ask themselves is how both can be achieved in terms of the right to inclusive education for all children.

The fact that 77.2 % of the pupils in special schools do not achieve any degree (Klemm, 2009) supports mother 1r's suspicion that future perspectives are negatively affected by special school. However, most informants in this study were convinced that special school had a positive effect on the future possibilities of their children. This is an obvious contradiction, which I think is important to be aware of. If more support was provided in the regular school, which is realizable according to Klemm (2009), would the special school still be the better option then?

5.2 Concluding remarks

This final subchapter of the thesis consists of two parts. The first one (5.2.1) provides a short summary of the key findings. After that, I reflect upon the process of this master thesis in subchapter 5.2.2, including its delimitations as well as implications for further research and educational practice in order to promote inclusive education.

5.2.1 Key findings and implications

Here, I want to give a brief overview over the key findings of this study. The research problem was: *How is the decision for regular or special school at the secondary level made for children with special socio-emotional needs?* These are the key findings obtained through listening to the mothers' voices:

- The decision was described as an interactive process between the mother, the teachers, and the child.
- The mother (or parents) is the decision maker according to the law. Yet the majority of them felt incompetent related to schooling options and relied on the recommendations of the teachers. Persistent regular schooling for a child with special socio-emotional needs seems to demand a high level of involvement on the part of the mother.

- The data showed that teachers had a great responsibility in terms of counseling parents in favor of a decision for regular secondary school. Yet their recommendations were in most cases colored by limited knowledge and based on pragmatic considerations. The majority of teachers in the sample did not prioritize the children's right to inclusion.

- A higher degree of problem behavior in combination with low school achievement on the part of the child promoted the decision for special school.

- Class size, teacher competence and care, belonging, and future perspectives were factors of significance to the mothers in the evaluation of a school type.

In spite of the small sample that does not serve to legitimize a generalization of the findings to a broader population, I want to formulate implications, which I believe apply to most other contexts aiming at more inclusive education. In regards to the target group of mothers in this study, *teachers have increased responsibility to pave the way for Joint Education through extensive and adequate parent counseling.* They can become key contributors in the development of inclusive education, but need significant further training and support in this task. In turn, *the duty to guarantee education and acknowledgement of the teachers' key function in the development towards inclusive education is placed on the state.* I recommend taking these implications into consideration when forwarding Joint Education in Thuringia or elsewhere in Germany.

5.2.2 Reflection

The purpose of this study was to make a contribution to empirical research in order to promote inclusive education in Germany. This means that it must be viewed in connection with other research in the field, as this study was delimited in several ways:

First, my informants were only mothers. However, there are many other possible informants who can contribute to a better understanding of the process towards the goal of inclusion, for example teachers or the children themselves. Fathers might also have some valuable information to add. Second, the informants in this study were limited to a number of seven and to having children with only one type of special needs. Third, only one method was used. The reason for this was explained in chapter 3.6. In order to explore the phenomenon under

study, I regard this approach as legitimate and adequate. However, it is important to be aware of these delimitations in order to avoid skewed or biased conclusions. *All findings presented in this study are based on the voices of seven mothers of children with special socio-emotional needs.* For example, the fact that a mother perceives a teacher to have little knowledge about her child's needs does not necessarily imply that this is really the case. It is nevertheless important to listen to the mothers' perceptions as they can only be addressed when they are known and understood.

In view of the delimitations of this study, I suggest further research in this field. In order to study the decision for type of school at secondary level for children with special needs, parents of children with different types of special needs should be interviewed, and these findings can be compared to the findings presented here. To check whether the implications I formulated in the preceding section correspond to the teacher's experience as well would also be of greatest interest. This can be done in another interview study with teachers as informants. As the use of multiple methods contributes to a broader understanding of a phenomenon, observation appears to be an appropriate method to use in order to shed light on general teaching practice in schools with Joint Education, especially in regular secondary schools. The suggested studies can be conducted in qualitative or quantitative ways. An extension of this study in a quantitative way would probably increase generalizability of the findings here.

However, the concept of naturalistic generalization as explained in chapter 3.6, encourages the reader to find meaning in the individual informants' stories and to make inferences to situations that are familiar to him or her. As a final remark, I therefore want to draw the reader's attention to the positive examples for Joint Education presented in this study. Although there is still a long way to go and a lot more to learn, it should also be acknowledged what already has been achieved. Mother 2r's stories, for example, sometimes surprised me because they reflected quite ideological theories about inclusion. Moreover, mother 1r's involvement can serve as an example for other mothers and show that regular schooling for children with special socio-emotional needs is possible to achieve in spite of a non-academic background.

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Appendix 1: Interview guide

This appendix contains the German original (1a) of the interview guide I used for conducting the interviews and its English translation (1b). Its detailed structure might evoke the idea of a more structured interview, rather than of a semistructured one. However, not all subquestions were asked in all interviews. Some answers emerged within the narratives of the informants. Also, follow-up questions were asked in the course of the interview. This guide was thus used as an orientation help for me, not as a rigid instrument for interrogation.

1a: Interview guide in German

Interview-Leitfaden

Einleitung mit Vorstellung, Hinweisen über Datenschutz und Klärung von Fragen

1. **Erzählen Sie mir bitte etwas über Ihre Familie, damit ich Sie besser kennen lernen kann.**
    - Wer sind Sie? Wie würden Sie sich beschreiben?
    - Wer gehört außerdem zur Familie?
    - Arbeits-/Wohnsituation der Eltern?
    - Wie alt sind eventuelle Geschwisterkinder, welche Schulen besuchen sie? Wie verstehen sich die Geschwister?
    - Bitte schildern Sie einen „normalen" Tag bei sich zu Hause. → Alltagsbeschreibung
    - Weiteres?

2. **Heute wollen wir ja vor allem über *(Name des Sohnes)*sprechen. Können Sie etwas über seine Persönlichkeit erzählen?**
    - Was fällt Ihnen zuerst ein?
      Welche Hobbies hat er?
      Hat er viele Freunde? Kennen Sie einige seiner Freunde?
    - Wie erleben Sie ihn zu Hause?
      Wie würden Sie Ihre Beziehung zu Ihrem Sohn beschreiben?

3. **Feststellung des sonderpädagogischen Förderbedarfs**
    - Hat *(Name des Sohnes)* eine medizinische Diagnose?
      Wenn ja, wie lautet diese?
    - Hat *(Name des Sohnes)* ein sonderpädagogisches Gutachten?
      Wenn ja, in welchem Bereich?

- Bitte beschreiben Sie, wie und wann der sonderpädagogische Förderbedarf bei *(Name des Sohnes)* festgestellt wurde.
  Wie war das für Sie?
- Bitte erzählen Sie, wie sich der sonderpädagogische Förderbedarf bei *(Name des Sohnes)* äußert.
  Wie denken Sie darüber? Wie geht es Ihnen damit?
- Was geht Ihnen durch den Kopf, wenn Sie versuchen, die Welt mit den Augen Ihres Sohnes zu betrachten?
- Nehmen/Nahmen Sie Therapien oder andere Unterstützungsangebote für sich oder Ihren Sohn in Anspruch?
  Sind Sie diesbezüglich beraten worden? Wenn ja, von wem?

4. **Lassen Sie uns nun zum Kern des Gesprächs kommen. Wie Sie wissen, interessiere ich mich besonders für die schulische Laufbahn Ihres Sohnes.**
   a. Kindergarten des Sohnes
      - War *(Name des Sohnes)*im Kindergarten?
        Wenn ja, in welchem?
        Wenn nein, warum nicht?
   b. Grundschule des Sohnes
      - Auf welche Grundschule ging *(Name des Sohnes)*?
      - Gab es weitere Schulwechsel?
        Wenn ja, wodurch verursacht?
   c. Wie haben Sie die Zusammenarbeit zwischen Ihnen und den Lehrern an früheren Schulen erlebt?
      - Wie oft hatten Sie Kontakt?
      - Welche Informationen haben Ihnen die Lehrer über *(Name des Sohnes)*gegeben?
      - Gab es ein Treffen mit Lehrern an der Grundschule, an das Sie sich erinnern? Bitte beschreiben Sie.
   d. Auf welche Schule geht Ihr Sohn jetzt?
      - Seit wann/welcher Klasse?
      - Zur Zeit in welche Klasse?
      - Wie weit ist die Schule vom Wohnort entfernt?
   e. Bitte beschreiben Sie so genau wie möglich, wie es dazu kam, dass Ihr Sohn jetzt gerade diese Schule besucht.
      - Wie haben Sie den Prozess der Schulwahl empfunden?
        Gab es Unterstützung/Widerstand?
        Von wem?
      - Kamen auch andere Schulen in Betracht?
        Wenn ja, welche?
        Woher wussten Sie von diesen anderen Schulen?

- Haben Sie sich selbst über verschiedene Möglichkeiten informiert?
  Wie?
- Sind Sie über verschiedene Schulen informiert worden?
  Wenn ja, von wem?
  Denken Sie, dass Sie ausreichend Informationen bekommen haben?

- Bei wem, meinen Sie, lag letztendlich die Entscheidung für die Schule? (Konnten Sie diese Entscheidung beeinflussen? Wenn ja, wie?)
- Inwiefern konnte Ihr Sohn die Schulentscheidung beeinflussen?

f. Was wissen Sie über das Thema „GU – Gemeinsamer Unterricht“ in Thüringen?
   - Wie ist Ihre Meinung dazu?
     Sehen Sie Vorteile?
     Nachteile?
   - Auf der anderen Seite, was sind Ihrer Meinung nach die Vor- oder Nachteile einer Beschulung am Förderzentrum?
   - Welche Schulform, denken Sie, ist für Ihr Kind am besten?
     Warum?

5. Erzählen Sie mir bitte mehr über die aktuelle Schule.

a. Größe der Schule, Größe der Klasse, allgemeine Stimmung
   Besondere Konzepte, z. B. Ganztagsschule, Reformansätze?
b. Was finden Sie an der Schule besonders gut?
   Gibt es etwas, dass Sie noch verbesserungsfähig finden?
c. Beschreiben Sie mir bitte, wie Sie die Zusammenarbeit zwischen Ihnen und den Lehrern an der Schule empfinden.
   - Welche Informationen geben Ihnen die Lehrer über *(Name des Sohnes)*?
   - Denken Sie, dass die Lehrer sich gut mit den besonderen Bedürfnissen Ihres Sohnes auskennen? Erläutern Sie bitte.
d. Wie äußern sich die Probleme Ihres Sohnes momentan an der Schule?
   Wie helfen die Lehrer *(Name des Sohnes)*, mit seinen Problemen umzugehen?
   Beispiel?
   Wird Ihr Sohn nach einem individuellen Förderplan unterrichtet?
e. Denken Sie, dass *(Name des Sohnes)* an dieser Schule mehr Unterstützung bekommt als an anderen Schulen?
   - Warum/warum nicht?
   - Was für Unterstützung bekommt *(Name des Sohnes)*? Können Sie ein Beispiel geben?
f. Denken Sie, dass es *(Name des Sohnes)* an der Schule gut geht?
   - Was erzählt er?
   - Hat er ein Lieblingsfach/einen Lieblingslehrer?
   - Hat er Freunde an der Schule?

g. Sind Sie zufrieden mit der Schule?
    - Warum/warum nicht?

6. **Welche Zukunftsaussichten haben Sie für *(Name des Sohnes)*?**
    - Hat Ihr Sohn selbst schon Vorstellungen von seiner Zukunft?
    - Was würden Sie sich für *(Name des Sohnes)* wünschen?
      Was kann er Ihrer Meinung nach erreichen?
    - Welche Rolle spielt die Schulentscheidung für die Zukunft von *(Name des Sohnes)*?
    - Wären die Zukunftsaussichten an einer anderen Schule besser/schlechter?
    - Was würden Sie sich für sich wünschen?

7. **Zum Abschluss würde ich Sie gerne noch bitten, mir eine Sache zu schildern, in der *(Name des Sohnes)* besonders gut ist. Erinnern Sie sich an eine spezielle Situation, in der Sie das bemerkt haben?**

Gibt es noch etwas hinzuzufügen? Haben Sie Fragen? – Ende des Interviews

Vielen Dank für das Gespräch.

1b: Interview guide in English

Interview guide

Introduction with presentation, assurance of confidentiality, and possibility to ask questions

1. **Please tell me about your family, so that I can get to know you a little better.**
    - Who are you? How would you describe yourself?
    - Who else belongs to the family?
    - What is the parents‘ work and living situation?
    - If there are siblings, how old are they and which schools do they attend?
      How do the siblings get along?
    - Please describe a “normal” day at your home. → description of everyday life
    - Other?

2. **As you know, we want to talk mostly about *(son’s name)* today. Could you tell me something about his personality?**
    - What comes into your mind at first?
      What are his hobbies?

Does he have many friends? Do you know some of them?

- How do you perceive him at home?
  How would you describe your relationship to your son?

3. Identification of special educational needs

- Has your son got a medical diagnosis?
  If yes, which one?
- Have your son's special educational needs been professionally evaluated?
  If yes, in which area?
- Please describe how and when your son's special educational needs have been identified.
  How was that for you?
- Please tell me how these special educational needs can be observed.
  How do you think about that? How does it make you feel?
- What goes through your mind when you try to watch the world through your son's eyes?
- Do you take part in or have you taken part in therapies or other support offers for you or your son?
  Have you received advice about such support offers? If yes, by whom?

4. Let's go to the core of the interview now. As you know, I am mainly interested in your son's school career.

a. Son's kindergarten
   - Did *(son's name)* attend kindergarten?
     If yes, which?
     If no, why not?

b. Son's primary school
   - Which primary school did *(son's name)* attend?
   - Were there more school changes?
     If yes, provoked by what?

c. How did you experience the collaboration between you and the teachers on previous schools?
   - How frequently were you in touch?
   - What kind of information did the teachers give you about *(son's name)*?
   - Do you remember a meeting with teachers at the primary school? Please describe.

d. What school does *(son's name)* attend now?
   - Since when/which grade?

- Currently in which grade?
- How far is the school from the living place?

e. Please describe as precisely as possible how it happened that your son now attends exactly this school.
   - How did you experience the process of choosing the school?
     Was there support/resistance?
     By whom?
   - Did you consider other schools as well?
     If yes, which?
     How did you know about these other schools?
     - Have you informed yourself about different options?
       How?
     - Have you been informed about different schools?
       If yes, by whom?
       Do you think that you were informed sufficiently?
   - In your opinion, who did actually make the decision for the current school?
     (Were you able to have an influence on this decision? If yes, how?)
   - In which way was your child able to influence the school decision?

f. What do you know about the topic *"Joint Education"* in Thuringia?
   - What is your opinion about it?
     Do you see advantages?
     Disadvantages?
   - On the other hand, according to you, what are the advantages and disadvantages of special schools?
   - Which type of school, in your opinion, suits your child best?
     Why?

5. Please tell me more about the current school.

- Size of school, size of class, general atmosphere
  Special concepts, e.g. full-time school, alternative pedagogical approach?
- What do you like the most about the school?
  Is there anything that you think should be improved?
- Please describe how you perceive the collaboration between you and the teachers at the school.
  - What kind of information do the teachers give you about *(son's name)*?
  - Do you think that the teachers have enough knowledge about your son's special needs?
- How do your son's problems find expression at the school at present?
  - How do the teachers help *(son's name)* to handle his problems at school? Example?
  - Is your son taught according to an individual education plan?

- Do you think that *(son's name)* gets more support at this school than at other schools?
    - Why/why not?
    - What kind of support does *(son's name)* get? Can you give an example?
- Do you think that *(son's name)* is happy at the school?
    - What does he tell you?
    - Does he have a favorite subject/teacher?
    - Does he have friends at school?
- Are you satisfied with the school?
    - Why/why not?

6. What future perspectives do you have for *(son's name)*?

- Does your son himself already have an idea about his future?
- What would you wish for *(son's name)*? What do you think he will be able to achieve?
- Which role does the school decision play for your son's future?
- Would the future perspectives be better/worse at another school?
- What would you wish for yourself?

7. Finally, I would like to ask you to describe one thing *(son's name)* is really good at. Do you remember a specific situation where you noticed his talent?

Is there anything to add? Do you have questions? – End of interview

Thank you very much for the conversation.

Appendix 2: Consent letter

This appendix contains the German original of the information and consent letter used for the sampling of informants (2a) and its English translation (2b). It was handed out to potential informants either by me or by the principal. The personal data it included, such as my home address and telephone number, are removed and replaced by squared brackets for the purpose of being presented here.

2a: Consent letter in German

Anfrage zur Teilnahme an einer Interview-Studie

Liebe Eltern,
für die Abschlussarbeit meines Studiums möchte ich sechs Interviews mit Müttern oder Vätern führen, deren Kind von Lehrern als verhaltensauffällig beschrieben wurde oder wird. Ihr Kind sollte in der 6. Klasse oder älter sein und eine Gesamt-, Regel- oder Sonderschule besuchen.

In dem etwa einstündigen Gespräch wird es vorwiegend um die Schulentscheidung für Ihr Kind gehen. Es interessiert mich, wie Sie als Eltern die Möglichkeiten Ihres Kindes in der Gesellschaft, insbesondere der Schule, wahrnehmen. Ich werde Ihnen dazu einige Fragen stellen und Ihnen zuhören.

Damit keine wichtigen Details verloren gehen, werde ich unser Gespräch aufnehmen und Notizen machen. Ich werde als einzige Person zu den Daten Zugang haben. In dem Bericht wird niemand Ihre Aussagen auf Sie zurückführen können. Nach Beendigung der Arbeit im Juni 2012 werden alle Aufnahmen und persönlichen Daten gelöscht.

Die Teilnahme an dem Forschungsprojekt ist freiwillig und kann jederzeit ohne Begründung zurückgezogen werden. Persönlich würde ich mich sehr über Ihre Teilnahme freuen. Es liegt in meinem Interesse, dass alle Kinder die gleichen Chancen auf eine passende Ausbildung haben und ich halte Ihre Meinung zu dem Thema für entscheidend. Auch die Schule Ihres Kindes unterstützt meine Studie. Durch Ihre Teilnahme handeln Sie im Interesse Ihres Kindes und anderer Kinder.

Zu meiner Person: Ich heiße Anne Petersmann und wohne in […], um an der Masterarbeit für mein Sonderpädagogik-Studium an der Universität Oslo in Norwegen zu arbeiten. Gebürtig komme ich aus Deutschland und beabsichtige, hier nach Abschluss meines Studiums zu arbeiten.

Wenn Sie zu einem Interview mit mir bereit sind, füllen Sie bitte die angefügte Einverständnis-erklärung aus und geben sie bis zum [Datum] bei [Name des Klassenlehrers] ab. Bei Fragen können Sie mich jederzeit anrufen. Weiterhin kann ich auf Wunsch den Kontakt zu meiner Tutorin Berit H. Johnsen an der Universität Oslo herstellen. Ihre Fragen kann ich gerne für Sie übersetzen.

Im Voraus möchte ich mich herzlich bei Ihnen bedanken und verbleibe mit freundlichen Grüßen,

[Unterschrift]

Anne Petersmann
[Kontaktdaten]

Einverständniserklärung

Ich bin mündlich und schriftlich über die Studie zum Thema Schulwahl für Kinder mit Verhaltensproblemen informiert worden und möchte

❑ teilnehmen.

Vor- und Zuname des teilnehmenden Elternteils:……

Unterschrift, Datum: ……

Telefonnummer: ……...

❑ nicht teilnehmen.

Name: ……

Unterschrift, Datum: ……

2b: Consent letter in English

Request to participate in an interview study

Dear parents,

For the final thesis of my studies, I want to interview six mothers or fathers whose child's behavior at school has been described as inappropriate by teachers. Your child should be in the 6th grade or older and should attend a special school or a regular school.

The interview will mainly be about the school decision for your child and last about one hour. I wonder how you as parents perceive your child's opportunities in society and especially in school. I will ask you several questions about this topic and listen to your answers.

The interview will be recorded and I will make notes so that no important details get lost. No one but me will have access to the data. Nobody will be able to recognize you in the report. When the thesis is finished in June 2012, all recordings and personal data will be erased.

It is voluntary to participate in the research project, and you have the possibility to withdraw without having to state a reason. I would personally appreciate your participation very much. It is in my interest that all children get equal opportunities and access to an adequate education, and I consider your opinion as very important. Also the school of your child supports my study. By participating, you act on behalf of your child and other children.

A little bit about me: My name is Anne Petersmann and I live in […] in order to work on the master's thesis for my studies in Special Needs Education at the University of Oslo in Norway. I am from Germany originally, and would like to work here after having finished my studies.

If you would like to participate in an interview, please complete the attached letter of consent and return it to [teacher's name] by [date]. If you have questions, you are welcome to contact me any time. I can further establish contact to my supervisor Berit H. Johnsen at the University of Oslo and translate your questions if you wish.

Thank you very much in advance!

Yours sincerely,

[signature]

Anne Petersmann

[contact data]

Letter of consent

I have received oral and written information about the study of school decision for children with behavior problems and

❑ would like to participate.

Full name of the participating parent: .....

Signature, date: .....

Phone number: .....

❑ do not want to participate.

Name: .....

Signature, date: .....

Appendix 3: Permission Norway

(Sensitive information is blacked out.)

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES

Harald Hårfagres gate 29
N-5007 Bergen
Norway
Tel: +47-55 58 21 17
Fax: +47-55 58 96 50
nsd@nsd.uib.no
www.nsd.uib.no
Org.nr. 985 321 884

Berit Helene Johnsen
Institutt for spesialpedagogikk
Universitetet i Oslo
Postboks 1140 Blindern
0318 OSLO

Vår dato: 18.07.2011 Vår ref: 27402 / 3 / MAB Deres dato: Deres ref:

TILRÅDING AV BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 14.06.2011. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

27402	*Parents' Voice in Decision between regular School and special School for Children with behavior Problems in Thuringia/Germany*
Behandlingsansvarlig	*Universitetet i Oslo, ved institusjonens øverste leder*
Daglig ansvarlig	*Berit Helene Johnsen*
Student	*Anne Petersmann*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, eventuelle kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven/-helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/prosjektoversikt.jsp.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 30.06.2012, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

for
Bjørn Henrichsen

Marte Bertelsen
Marte Bertelsen

Kontaktperson:Marte Bertelsen tlf: 55 58 33 48
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering
Kopi: Anne Petersmann, [redacted] OSLO

Personvernombudet for forskning

Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

Prosjektnr: 27402

Formålet med prosjektet er å undersøke hvorvidt foreldre til barn med atferdsvansker kan bestemme skole selv i henhold til internasjonale erklæringer for inkludering.

Utvalget består av foreldre til barn som viser atferdsvansker i skolen i byen [redacted] i Tyskland. Derav tre foreldre med et barn med atferdsvansker i spesialskole og tre foreldre med et barn med atferdsvansker i den regulære skolen.

Utvalget rekrutteres ved at lærer ved de ulike skolene gir informasjonsskriv til potensielle foreldre. De av foreldrene som ønsker å delta på intervju tar så direkte kontakt med student eller lærer som gav dem informasjonsskrivet. Personvernombudet anser det som viktig at gode rutiner blir overholdt ved rekruttering av potensielle informanter (foreldre).

Informasjonsskrivet finnes tilfredsstillende.

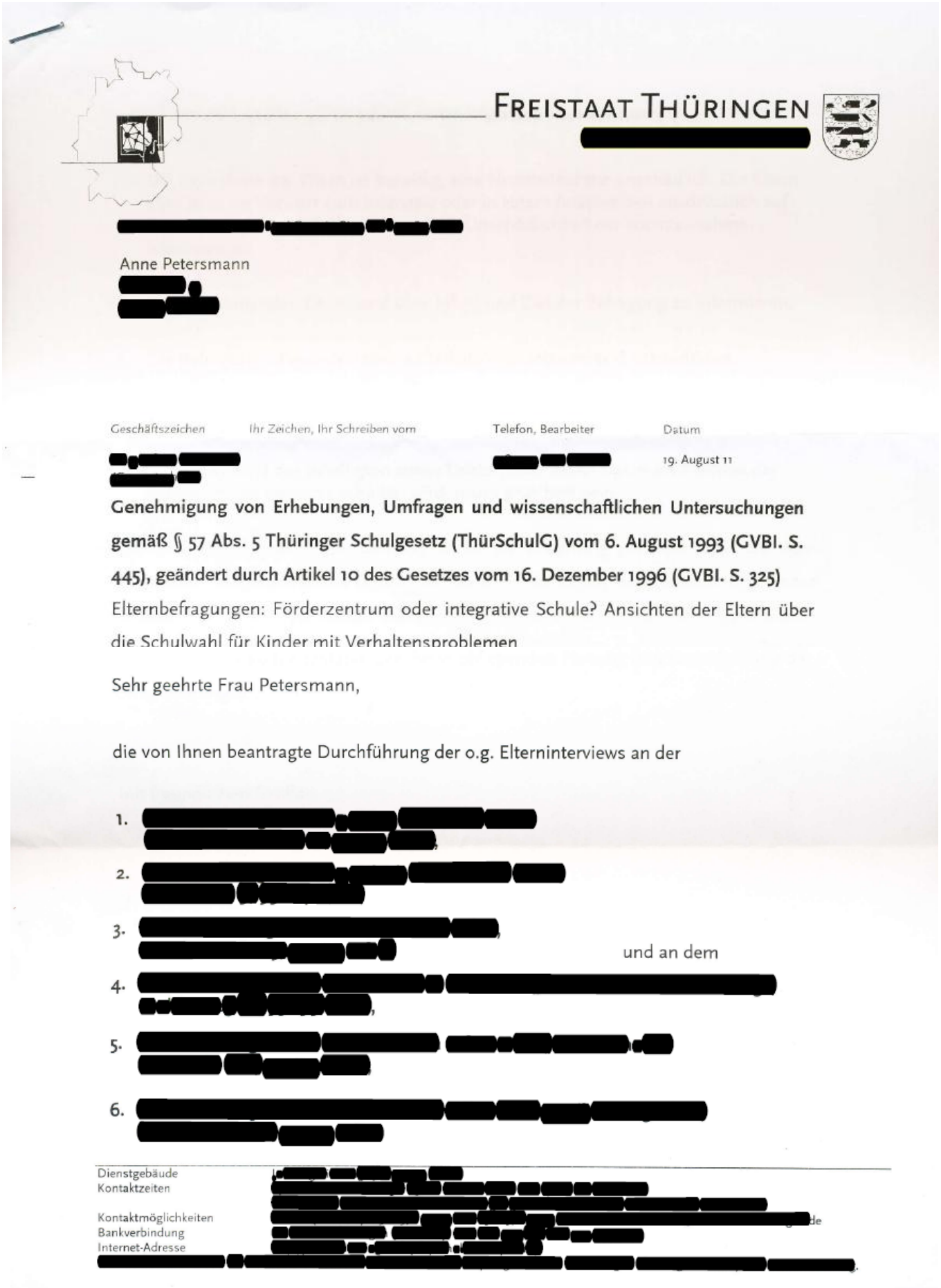
Det vil i prosjektet kunne bli registrert sensitive personopplysninger om helseforhold.

Ingen enkeltpersoner vil kunne gjenkjennes i den ferdige masteroppgaven.

Prosjektslutt er 30.06.2011. Ved prosjektslutt skal lydopptak slettes og datamaterialet anonymiseres. Med anonymisering menes at direkte personidentifiserbare opplysninger som navn slettes, og at indirekte personidentifiserbare opplysninger som alder, kjønn og bosted, endres eller slettes.

Appendix 4: Permission Germany

(Sensitive information is blacked out.)



FREISTAAT THÜRINGEN

[redacted]

Anne Petersmann
[redacted]

Geschäftszeichen	Ihr Zeichen, Ihr Schreiben vom	Telefon, Bearbeiter	Datum
[redacted]		[redacted]	19. August 11

Genehmigung von Erhebungen, Umfragen und wissenschaftlichen Untersuchungen gemäß § 57 Abs. 5 Thüringer Schulgesetz (ThürSchulG) vom 6. August 1993 (GVBl. S. 445), geändert durch Artikel 10 des Gesetzes vom 16. Dezember 1996 (GVBl. S. 325)

Elternbefragungen: Förderzentrum oder integrative Schule? Ansichten der Eltern über die Schulwahl für Kinder mit Verhaltensproblemen

Sehr geehrte Frau Petersmann,

die von Ihnen beantragte Durchführung der o.g. Elterninterviews an der

1. [redacted]
2. [redacted]
3. [redacted]

und an dem

4. [redacted]
5. [redacted]
6. [redacted]

Dienstgebäude [redacted]
Kontaktzeiten [redacted]
Kontaktmöglichkeiten [redacted]
Bankverbindung [redacted]
Internet-Adresse [redacted]

wird gemäß § 57 Abs. 5 ThürSchulG unter folgenden Voraussetzungen genehmigt:

1. Die Teilnahme der Eltern ist freiwillig, eine Nichtteilnahme unschädlich. Die Eltern sind dazu im Vorwort zum Interview oder in einem Anschreiben ausdrücklich auf die Freiwilligkeit der Teilnahme und die Unschädlichkeit der Nichtteilnahme hinzuweisen.

2. Die teilnehmenden Eltern sind über Inhalt und Ziel der Befragung zu informieren.

3. Die Befragung ist grundsätzlich außerhalb des Unterrichts durchzuführen.

4. Auf die Nennung des Namens der Schule auf dem Interviewbogen ist zu verzichten.

5. Die Anonymität der Beteiligten sowie Dritter, über deren Daten im Rahmen der Untersuchung Kenntnis erhalten wird, muss gesichert sein.

Die Genehmigung der Untersuchung ist an die Erwartung geknüpft, dass Sie dem [redacted] Informationen über die dabei gewonnenen Ergebnisse bereitstellen. Eine Kopie dieses Bescheides ist dem Schulleiter der beteiligten Schule vor Durchführung der Befragung vorzulegen. Die endgültige Entscheidung treffen die Schulleiterinnen bzw. Schulleiter. Mit ihnen stimmen Sie bitte erforderliche Termine sowie alle weiteren Modalitäten der Ihnen obliegenden Planung und Durchführung der Untersuchung ab.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen
Im Auftrag

[redacted]